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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Caroline Jack Rescues Cats

But who will care for Caroline Jack?

by Carol Harvey

I was carried along in the currents and eddies of swirling crowds in San Francisco, walking fast down Powell Street to the corner of Post where the Disney store beams its technicolor yellow light onto the street. For two years I had passed a woman sitting quietly in her wheelchair across from Union Square, a soft body of calm in the slipstream of frenzied activity.

Three or four cats sleep curled in the nest of blankets in her lap. Sometimes she herself dozes, granny glasses slipping down her nose. Sometimes people stand chatting or patting and stroking her cats. Sometimes the tiny orange kitten bats the nose of the larger gray, and skitters from the sidewalk to the street.

Day after day, tourists, shoppers, and business people pass, smiling or looking curiously down at her and her cats. They may hand her a dollar, or extend a brown paper bag containing fast food or coffee. Caroline accepts these diplomatic gifts with a placid smile of thanks, and a few words.

Parents come close, instructing their children to stand behind them near the glass windows of the Disney store. Caroline says they are obviously afraid their kids will "get something from her cats. Cats are very clean. They wash and groom themselves all the time."



Caroline Jack shows her cats off to a young child. Lydia Gans photos



Caroline rescues stray cats from the public, from hospital research labs, from behind the SPCA office where pit bull trainers get boxes of abandoned kittens to train blood lust into their dogs, or from other street folk who may be abusing them.

Caroline's Mrs. Santa Claus persona is so benign and non-aggressive that, when I finally stopped to talk, she threw me off balance with her observant sense of humor. She pointed to the joke-shop rubber chicken dangling from my key chain and said, "I want one of those. That's what our leaders are selling us these days about the so-called war. They are going to be the rubber chicken in the end."

Caroline Jack looks like your grandmother and panhandles from her wheelchair. She is not on drugs; she is not crazy; she is simply disabled, and cannot pay for an apartment in the inflated rental market in San Francisco. She lost her home in the residential hotel where she first started collecting abandoned cats.

For 13 years, Caroline has cared for stray cats, rescuing them from the general public, from research labs in hospitals, from behind the SPCA

See **Caroline Jack** *page 23*

Meridian Gallery Unlocks Creativity of Urban Youth

by Carl Heyward

Think of this: Young people anxious to perform a task, file a folder, word process in an office, scrub a floor, sit in at community meetings, answer telephones, face their fears and face down what is taken for sullen shyness, take on tasks seemingly out of their range (certainly beyond their limited experience) with good humor and an attitude of stick-to-it-iveness rare in any age or breed...

Youth with the persuasion of the 'hood, the color combinations, affiliations and subtle, tacit ranks of so much youthful importance — to override all this, transcend the new, pants-falling-off-the-buttocks-too-large-for-even-three-fat-men-to-fit attitude is a feat of hope, trust and love. It is special evidence of the human spirit available to the generous of mind at any age and any place; it is rare, but is seen.

The value of real-world, hands-on experience made available through the Meridian Interns Program, founded in 1996 in San Francisco, is measured in the faces of joy and the concentration of its participants who learn about arts and the operating of a nonprofit gallery and performance space, receive job training, participate in community service and develop the self-confidence necessary to sustain them throughout life in that real world.

"This program was great," said Lily Dang, a Meridian Interns participant from 1997-1999 who later studied at California College of Arts and Crafts and is currently enrolled at S.F. State University. "I learned how to interpret the art that I saw, and even to do some artwork of my own. I loved it so much that I went to the gallery every day. Because I lived in a small place, I couldn't do any big pieces so on Saturday I go to the gallery on my own time. Not only that, I was able to meet artists. What made everything so great is that I found a place where I know I belong."

Youth making the often-difficult transition to adulthood may already have substantial bits of baggage to manage, including linguistic, economic, legal, familial and academic barriers and issues.

Additionally, there may be problems of social practice, of cross- and intercultural identification that amounts to a certain kind of segregation — a separation that seems to break down in the nurturing, interdependent atmosphere of Meridian's intern setting, where there is a tendency to

See **Meridian Gallery** *page 12*



Meridian Gallery interns Cindy Mo and Jade Lui work on the *Urban Nature* mural.

Meridian Gallery imparts lessons in growth and compassion not limited exclusively to what can often be a sterile and distanced gallery environment out of touch with, if not disdainful of, the real world and the communities from which these young people come.

A New National Movement Fights for Housing

by James Tracy

Activists in nearly four dozen cities took to the streets in the "National Day Of Housing Action" on November 14, which linked local housing issues with the call to establish a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The fund, if established, would build low-income housing financed through the excess interest payments on Federal Home Administration (FHA) bonds. The campaign's demands are embodied in two bills now in Congress; HR 2349 and S 1248.

The Day Of Housing Action not only served as a national pressure tactic for needed reform, but is significant in several other ways. First, it reflects a growing understanding that the homelessness crisis is a direct consequence of the housing crisis — housing for working-class families is increasingly unaffordable. Secondly, it signaled a shift in focus for the housing movement, adding a national perspective to vital organizing which is usually neighborhood-bound. Against the backdrop of the war in Afghanistan, the day sent a clear message that the fight for living wages and truly affordable housing is likely to intensify in the coming years.

The national housing/homelessness crisis is directly related to cuts in federal spending. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has cut the funding available for permanent, low-cost housing every year since 1979. Instead of 'revitalization from below,' federal housing policy has been aimed at the demolition of pubic housing with the reconstruction of substantially fewer units. Over the past few years, changing income requirements have made it nearly impossible for people to exit homelessness through federally subsidized housing.

The protests on the Day of Housing Action were reminiscent of the Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s, the struggles which brought the housing safety net into existence in the first place. Striking was the alliance built between students, homeless people, organized labor, faith and community groups.

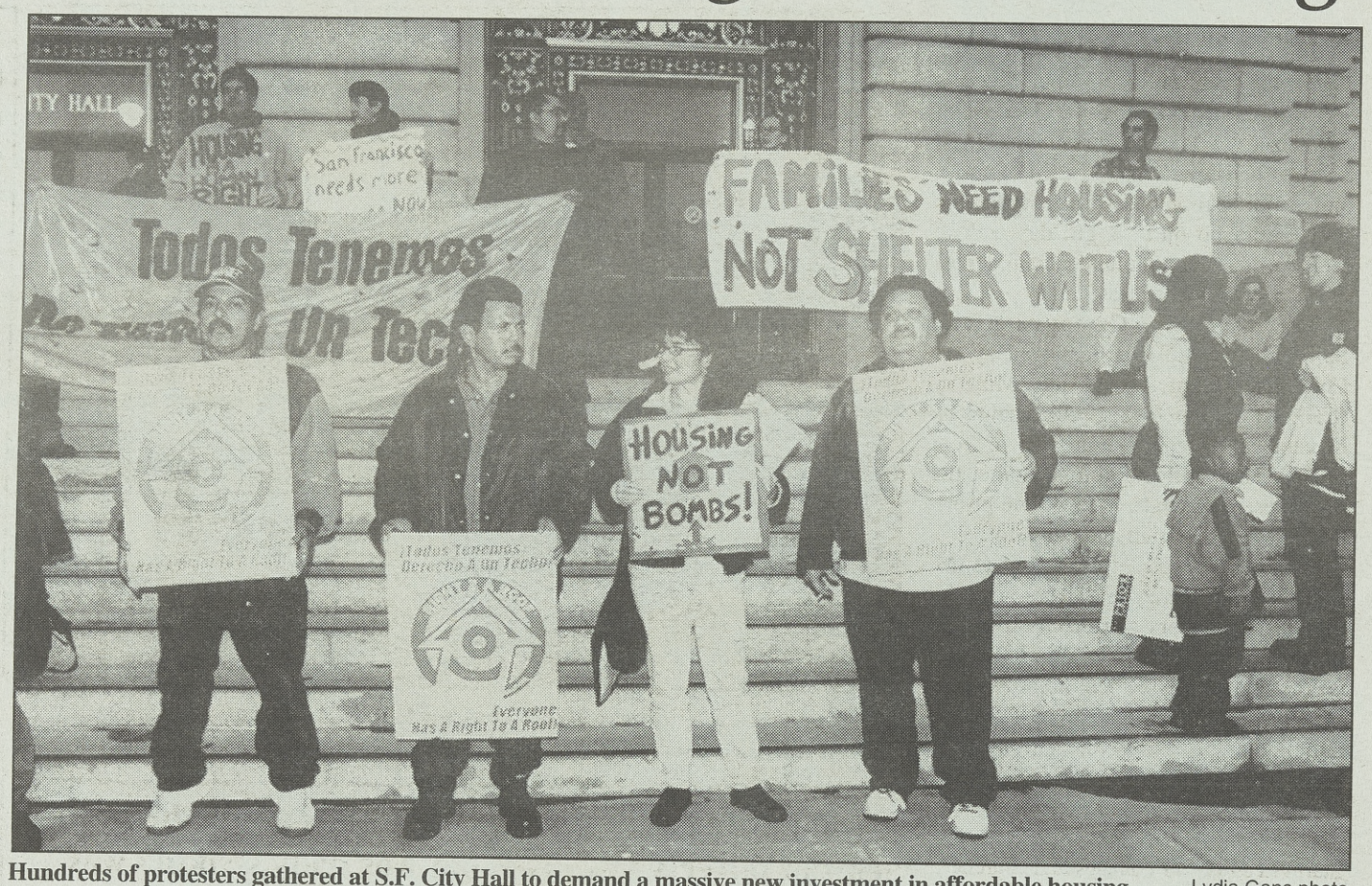
The day was initiated by Housing America and the San Francisco Coalition On Homelessness and quickly joined by the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness and the National Coalition On Homelessness. The day of action received key support from the San Francisco Labor Council and Religious Witness with Homeless People.

In Washington, D.C., a diverse network of groups, including the city-wide tenant alliance Real Change Human Rights Organization and public housing residents facing eviction through the federal HOPE VI program, took over a vacant firehouse to demand it be used for housing. In San Francisco, more than 300 people rallied and took a "housing reality tour" through the Tenderloin, one of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods. During the tour, homeless people and community folks spoke out about organizing against the waves of evictions and displacement which persist in the post-"dot-com boom" era.

The march had representatives from nearly every neighborhood in town. As the march moved on, people left their apartments, homeless shelters and street corner hangouts. At the conclusion of the march, Homes Not Jails took over a vacant residential hotel at the corner of 6th and Howard which could easily house more than 100 people if renovated. The takeover resulted in the arrests of eight people as an angry landlord looked on.

Around the rest of the country the tactics were diverse and spirited, ranging

See **National Day of Housing Action** *page 22*



Hundreds of protesters gathered at S.F. City Hall to demand a massive new investment in affordable housing. Lydia Gans photo

The city has in some respects replaced the giant factory of old as the best place to fight strategic struggles for economic justice. Along with the fight for real living wages, the housing struggle is one of boundless opportunities for movement building.

We All Have the Right to a Roof

Housing activists are arrested after taking over vacant building in San Francisco

by Gretchen Hildebran,
PoorNewsNetwork

The crowd shouted wildly as it approached the corner of 6th and Howard Street in San Francisco in the early evening darkness. Laughs, songs and cheers washed over the frustrated honks of the nearby commuters like a fresh and exuberant wind. As we approached the intersection, a cluster of waving people appeared in the second-story rooms of the giant empty building on the corner that used to house hundreds of people and families. Two banners unfurled from the windows, welcoming us and echoing our cheers; they read: "Aqui estamos y no nos vamos!" and "Everyone has a right to a roof!"

The protest march and Housing Reality Tour on November 14 was organized by the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Campaign, a coalition of local and national housing rights groups, tenants, poor people, homeless folks and families.

While the United States spends approximately one billion dollars a day to fight a war in Afghanistan, poor people and activists are organizing this campaign to make the government put its resources into fighting poverty at home. The Affordable Housing Trust, which could be funded for one year by the last week of government military spending alone, would build 1.5 million affordable homes in the United States over the next 10 years.



San Francisco police use a battering ram to bash through the door of a vacant hotel where housing activists had barricaded themselves inside. Alison Lum photo

The protest began with a group of several hundred people gathering in the late afternoon shadow of San Francisco City Hall. Families, SRO tenants and homeless folks held up placards reading "Housing for All!" and "Housing for the Homeless!" to passing cars as local gospel group Bay City Love sang "Down By the Riverside."

Krea Gomez of the Homeless Prenatal Program, one of the campaign organizers, started things up by reminding the crowd that we all struggle with the need for affordable housing, and that this everyday reality cannot be ignored anymore.

James Tracy from Right 2 A Roof explained next that the National Day of Housing Action was a nationwide protest happening simultaneously in cities across the United States, and was held to advocate to Congress the importance of the housing trust bill, to be voted on early next year. Maria Orsonio and Cindy Weisner from POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights) added that economic justice must be part of any affordable housing program. Living wage jobs are just as important as affordable housing, so that people can keep and care for their homes.

After police arrested the protesters and forcibly removed them, only the voices of resistance remained, whistling through the now-empty building, "Everyone has a Right to a Roof."

The crowd had swelled as night fell and I picked up a sign as the march began: "Housing is Hope." Hope did pick up momentum, even as we made our way to various sites in the Tenderloin and South of Market that represented the greed, ignorance and misrepresentation that perpetuate the current lack of housing for so many. With the revving engines of police motorcycles surrounding us, we walked to the offices of Housing and Urban Development, where speakers addressed the government policy which has pulled back financing of subsidized housing over

See **The Right to a Roof** *page 22*

A March from San Jose Gives Poverty a Human Face

by Ellen Danchik

In the tradition of the Poor People's March on Washington, D.C., organized by Martin Luther King, Jr., a spirited group of 200 men, women, and children marched from San Jose to San Francisco on an eight-day trek to reclaim the economic and human rights of the poor and homeless.

The March for Compassion and Spiritual Renewal was organized by the Community Homeless Alliance Ministry (CHAM) of San Jose. It culminated on November 4th in San Francisco in front of City Hall with its golden dome, the ever-present reminder of the civic priorities that favor the rich and powerful.

Rev. Scott Wagers, founder of CHAM, described the journey as "a very powerful march." Protesters started off from the First Christian Church in San Jose with 200 people, many of them homeless people living in the church shelter. The first night, the marchers held a big program at San Jose City College, and then held similar gatherings all along the 60-mile stretch of the march, organizing events at Stanford and other colleges and churches.

At each stop, Wagers said, the marchers held "a teach-in, not just about health care, housing and a living minimum wage, but also about the spiritual teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Cesar Chavez and how they give impetus to the movement."

The group was invited to stay in churches along the way by congregations whose generous members housed and fed the marchers to support their cause. Wagers estimated that the group passed out 6,000 flyers and met with hundreds of people during their eight days on the road.

Wagers explained the purpose of the march. "One theme was economic human rights for all, based on the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that was signed by the United States, which states that all people have the right to housing, healthcare, and food. The other theme was compassion and spiritual renewal, that all people of faith must recommit themselves to their respective faiths. The two themes wound themselves together like two strands in a rope and created a powerful overall theme. In each place the people were hungry for the message and wanted to know more about human rights violations. We think poverty is a human rights violation and to carry that message we had other groups join us."

As they entered Civic Center in San Francisco to join Religious Witness with Homeless People for a rally and prayer service, something powerful emanated from the marchers. Just as they had marched to transform the hearts and minds of the communities they passed through, so had they been transformed by the experience. There was a feeling of solidarity, community, and a connection with a higher purpose that arose from them.

Adrienne Lawton, assistant pastor of CHAM, said, "The marchers became so empowered and became leaders in just eight days. It was a lot of pressure to get up early every morning and walk the long miles and sleep in different places every night and come together with other groups. It's been phenomenal. I can't say enough about the spirit and how God has really blessed everybody."



After homeless people and activists marched from San Jose to San Francisco, they held a prayer service at S.F. City Hall to call for justice and compassion.

By marching through the streets they made the problems of poverty visible. What was truly striking was the number of children on the march and the horrible truth that children in our country are forced to plead for a roof over their heads.

By marching for so many days and spreading the message of compassion, a collective sacrifice was made, not just for the participants themselves but for those who could not march. And by marching through the streets they made the problems of poverty visible and confronted communities with that reality. What was truly striking was the number of children on the march and the horrible truth that children in our country are forced to plead for a roof over their heads.

Muliaga Togo Togo of CHAM, who marched with his wife and two young children, stated that, "The march was an experience within itself. At times we were rejected and laughed at. It made us stronger people to march for our cause. We are not only representing ourselves, but speaking for others who could not be here. America has to take a really good look right now and develop a new strategy and get its priorities straight, otherwise this will never be resolved."

An inspiring prayer service followed at Civic Center Plaza. Sister Bernie Galvin welcomed the marchers by affirming the goals of Religious Witness with Homeless People, a co-sponsor of the march and organizer of the prayer service.

"Throughout the last eight years, the friends and members and leaders of Religious Witness with Homeless People have stood faithfully with poor and homeless people and we are going to continue to stand on the side of the poor," Galvin said. "We are going to continue to march and pray and lobby and engage in nonviolent civil disobedience. We are going to continue to build coalitions, to conduct housing campaigns, and work with our elected officials; all of this and more, until the policies of homelessness in our cities are characterized by justice and compassion."

The interfaith service was led by representatives of Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths, as well as other community activists. Rev. Schuyler Rhodes of Temple United Methodist Church gave a heartfelt sermon in which he stated, "We share a struggle. The struggle that we enter into is a struggle for equal housing for all, for equal justice for all, so that all people may have jobs, so that all people may have hope, so that all people may walk forward into a new day of liberation."

The march was a transformative experience for the marchers themselves and for those they reached out to. Martin Luther King, Jr. once proclaimed, "The day we see the truth and cease to speak is the day we begin to die." I believe King would have been proud to hear marcher Muliaga Togo Togo say on the eighth day of the march, "We are here for one cause. We are here to open America's eyes and ears to the voice of the unseen, the voice of the unheard, the voice of the misfit and the voice of the poor."

Homeless Christmas

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

Here I am, tonight
a lonely Christmas night
a starless snowy night,
no tree that's shining bright

no holly and mistletoe, no cheer in
falling snow
all alone —

Nowhere are there sleigh bells in the air
No choirs can you hear
No voices full of cheer for the homeless,
Music to them is toneless
The night is long and old,
and everything's white with snow
The snow to them is just cold
Still nowhere to go... nowhere to go!
Alone — a long way from a home!

Missing the Albany Landfill Campers

(based on a Street Spirit interview, November 2001)

by Claire J. Baker

"Picasso Mike" Smith lived in a teepee by the Bay. I translate his features & demeanor: an Ohlone Indian drawn back to an area where his ancestors had thrived. Mike strikes me as

masterful, wise — his abode blending naturally into foreground stubble & background water. Mike & his tent are two photos from a freer time when a few hardy homeless carved a survival niche among weeds & *rubble, bothered no one* — even got creative & long-lasting.

Nothing there now but feral cats,
some raccoons, rabbits, off-beat
dog walks, a midden for memories.
I never knew Mr. Smith &
the others, but somehow I miss them
& all they stood for....

Street Spirit

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Berkeley Vigil Against National Disgrace of Poverty

by Terry Messman

"True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice that produces beggars needs restructuring." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Organizations fighting hunger and homelessness rallied on November 13 in front of Berkeley's Old City Hall for a solemn remembrance of the homeless people who died last year on the streets of the wealthiest nation on earth.

Artist Matthew Behnke and 20 volunteers swiftly erected a memorial arch made out of shopping carts. The assembly then held aloft candles to pay silent tribute to the lost lives of homeless people who will never again have to contend with hunger, sleepless nights, exposure to cold and stormy weather, and police rousts.

But the assembly didn't gather only to mourn for those who have died, but to fight with renewed dedication for the still-living victims of economic inequality.

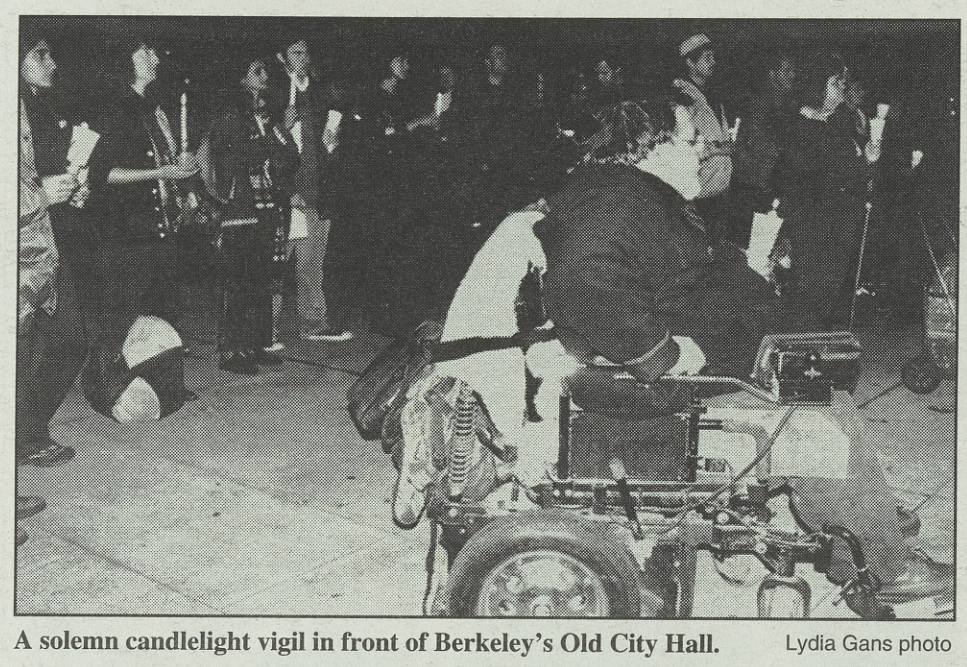
The candlelight vigil called for compassion of the kind championed by Martin Luther King, Jr., a compassion that radically challenges the economic structures that produce beggars, hunger, homelessness, and premature deaths. Too often, homeless people die long before their time, the hazards and dangers of life on the streets resulting in a life expectancy decades shorter than the national average.

"Tonight we want to remember the folks who are not here, people who have died on the streets, in the shelters and in hospitals," said boona cheema, executive director of BOSS. With that, Michael Diehl, staff organizer for the BOSS Community Organizing Team, led the gathering in commemorating homeless people who died last year on the streets and alleys of the East Bay, or who passed away while sleeping in their vehicles.

In Berkeley and Oakland, homeless people almost always remain nameless and faceless in death, as in life — unmourned, unremembered and, in a final insult, uncounted by the Alameda County coroner. The City of San Francisco holds an annual count of homeless deaths, and the S.F. Medical Examiner releases to the public an official investigation into the causes of each of their deaths.

Yet in the East Bay, homeless people perish in anonymity, the victims of official inaction that neglects them in life then ignores them in death. The apathy of Alameda County in failing to even tabulate homeless deaths is now being questioned by growing numbers of activists.

Father Bill O'Donnell, the priest of St. Joseph the Worker in Berkeley, gave a stark description of how the poor die of social neglect in the midst of national affluence. "Homeless people do not die in the street, or in a doorway, or in a park, or in an accident," he said. "Homeless people die from being ignored, abandoned, desperate, of being diseased. Or in one last lurch for relief, overdose."



A solemn candlelight vigil in front of Berkeley's Old City Hall. Lydia Gans photo

We honor the lost lives of homeless people who will never again have to contend with hunger, sleepless nights, exposure to cold and stormy weather, and police rousts.

In death, O'Donnell said, the forgotten homeless pass "from low life to no life, wasted, dissed, unmourned. Careless society is relieved."

The gathering was held as part of National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, November 11-17, and was organized by BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency), Food First, Homeless Action Center, Berkeley Emergency Food and Housing Project, and Housing Rights. Food Not Bombs and the Dorothy Day House provided food for scores of homeless people who attended.

Poet Dylan Thomas urged those who are dying to "not go gentle" into death, but rather to "Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Anuradha Mittal, executive director of Food First, offered that same impassioned outcry to those gathered at Old City Hall. "We are no longer willing to die on the streets in America," she said. "It is shameful in the richest nation on earth to have hunger and homelessness."

Mittal's organization, the Food First Institute for Food and Development Policy, has worked for decades to raise public awareness about the causes of hunger in impoverished countries around the globe. But she said that it is vital at this moment to make the public more aware of growing hunger in America.

"When we talk of hunger and homelessness, we think only of Third World countries," she said. "Because poor people in our country have been made invisible: America's disappeared. This government is dropping bombs on the starving people of Afghanistan. The same government is planning economic warfare on the hungry and homeless in this country. We're demanding our human rights to food and housing."

When BOSS interviewed homeless people in Berkeley as part of their survey on homeless civil rights, interviewers were told by many homeless people that they experienced the physical pangs of hunger every month. "I think that's intolerable," BOSS director cheema said.

Mary McAdams, a nurse, told the gathering how quickly poverty can become lethal. She injured her back while providing nursing care to people in their homes, and then, in short order, became unemployed and homeless. "It was a devastating thing because I couldn't do anything about it," she said. "When I became homeless I wasn't able to help my son, who was also homeless, with diabetes."

McAdams, 53, said her adult son died recently, still homeless, just before his 32nd birthday, in an alley in Richmond. "Many people, not just my son, have lost their lives from being homeless," she said.

McAdams read to the gathering a passage from *Proverbs* 22: 22-23 that sounds like a prophetic warning to the federal government to cease afflicting the poor with cuts in housing, welfare, disability benefits and food assistance. "*Because a man is poor, do not therefore cheat him, nor, at the city gate, oppress anybody in affliction; for the Lord takes up their cause, and extorts the life of the extortioners.*"

McAdams said of the passage, "I think it speaks volumes about what happens when people don't help the poor. I think people who fail to provide adequate housing are causing a disservice to themselves."

Berkeley City Councilmember Kriss Worthington sounded a similar theme in challenging Berkeley to do more to help alleviate the suffering of homeless people. "I understand that Berkeley has spent a lot of money on homeless programs," he said, "but it's not enough for Berkeley to rest on its laurels. We need a dignified, affordable place for everyone to live in Berkeley."

Worthington warned that the economic downturn would swell the ranks of the homeless, straining an already overcrowded shelter system and overtaxing scant affordable housing resources. "With the coming economic collapse," he said, "hundreds of homeless people are going to be joined by people who may have jobs right now, but who are going to be homeless. I think it is outstanding that you are here to put pressure on the City of Berkeley to improve services and expand housing for the hundreds and thousands of people who will be homeless in the coming year."

Michael Pachovas, a disabled Berkeley resident who helped organize the demonstration, said, "Our Administrative leaders have been loath to commit funds to assist the homeless, the hungry and the medically needy. We, as American citizens, must pick up that torch and bring light to shine upon those traits that truly exemplify the best of what it is to be an American: compassion, rooting for the underdog, humanity, generosity, and practicing tolerance."

Pachovas praised the outpouring of generosity shown by American citizens in giving to "the victims and heroes in New York," but pointed out that contributions to nonprofit groups serving the hungry and homeless have severely diminished since September 11. "Record numbers of Americans are now finding themselves unable to afford their housing, their energy needs, or their health care," Pachovas said. "While at the same time that our government is dropping over a million food packages to the needy refugees of Afghanistan, almost 40 million Americans are going to bed hungry."

It was left to The Funky Nixons to play a rousing anthem that captured the evening's spirit of populist resistance to the national disgrace of worsening poverty. The Nixons sang "Screw The Rich" right out loud on the steps of Old City Hall: "They got their private clubs and society/ Living and a-loving like a bunch of thieves/ All the best bread, all the best meat/ Don't give a damn what the rest of us eat!"

Smart Growth for All, Not Just for the Rich

by Ryan Hurley

The fashionable rallying cry during this period of much-publicized vulnerability seems to be "God Bless America!" Frankly, this sentiment strikes me as a little ironic when there are so many problems threatening our communities that are receiving scant attention while the "war on terrorism" unfolds.

The mass media is showing pictures of hunger and poverty in Afghanistan, but not in this country, making it seem as if hunger and poverty only exist elsewhere. According to Food First, hunger has risen 50 percent since 1985; 36 million people suffer from hunger daily. The percentage of children living below the poverty line increased 49 percent over the last 30 years. There are 12 million people who have experienced homelessness in this country.

Increases in hunger, poverty, and homelessness in the Bay Area are due in great part to the ubiquitous housing crisis. In 1998, there were 84,500 low-income renters in Oakland, but only 36,800 rental units, for a shortfall of almost 50,000 units.

The way to alleviate these widespread problems is through equitable community development. Yet, as the economy falters and the number of people on the brink of poverty and homelessness rises sharply, the federal government prioritizes greater corporate welfare and military spending.

Smart Growth, an increasingly popular set of regional and urban planning principles, has become one of the most important legislative issues for this country. Smart Growth has to do with revitalizing cities by improving the link between land use and transportation. It is creating compact communities in which housing, jobs, public transit, schools, and retail stores are located close to each other so that people of all socio-economic levels can live, work, and play in the same communities.

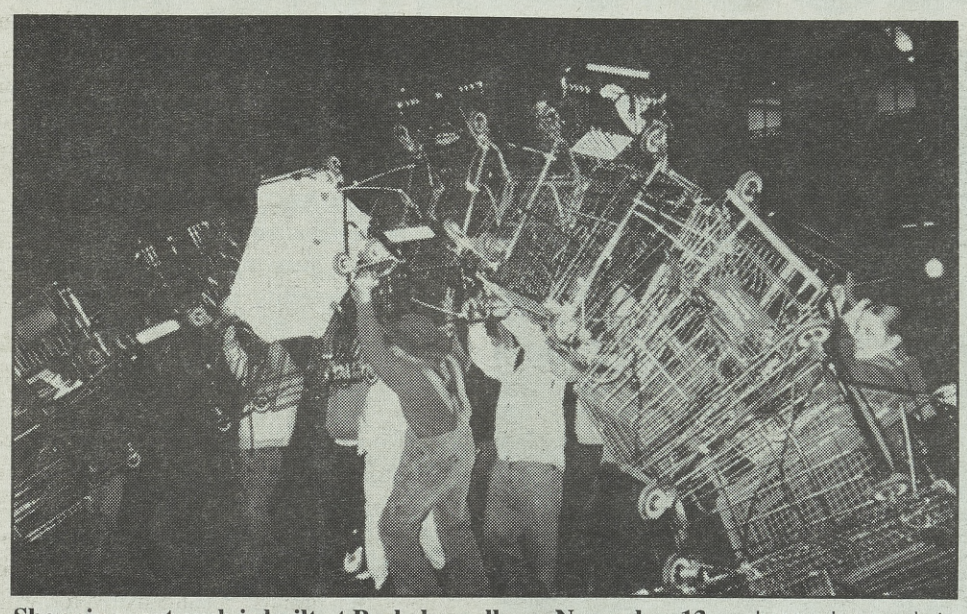
Many Bay Area Smart Growth plans are anything but smart. Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown wants to revitalize downtown by bringing in 6,000 higher-tax-bracket residents and more up-scale businesses. The plan will force many low-income residents out of downtown, but will not provide new affordable units. This so-called 10K Plan seeks to make downtown more vibrant and livable at the expense of the low-income population.

Smart Growth plans in the Bay Area project huge job growth in high-skill sectors that will require the importation of workers from outside the area and the construction of high-cost housing for them. The plans do not consider the possibility of investing in local education and training so that current residents can fill these jobs, thereby raising their incomes and reducing population growth.

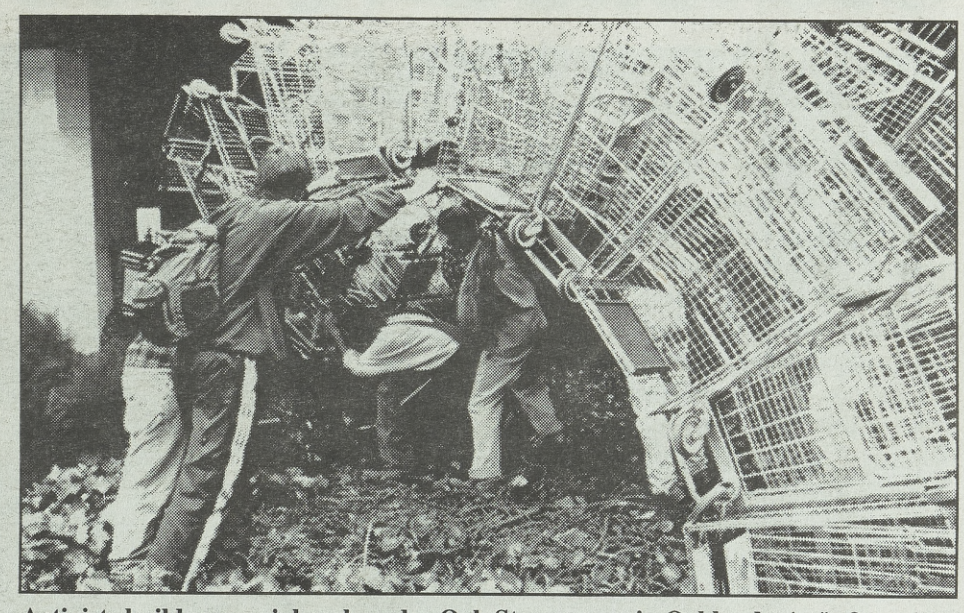
These "Smart" Growth plans are discriminatory. As patriotic people, we must resist biased growth in favor of building stronger communities with universal access to good jobs, reliable public transit, affordable housing, and strong schools. If we are going to foster true national unity and pride, then the mass media, politicians, and the rest of us need to give more weight to the concerns and needs of all Americans.

Ryan Hurley is a staff member of Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS).

'These Arches Are a Memorial and a Protest'



Shopping cart arch is built at Berkeley rally on November 13. boona cheema photo



Activists build memorial arch under Oak St. overpass in Oakland. Lydia Gans photo

by Matthew Behnke

Many thanks to everyone who helped build Shopping Cart Arch #6 on the steps of Old City Hall in Berkeley on November 13. It was different from the previous five arches we have built in the sad, evacuated campsites of the exiled homeless. This time, an air of celebration and solidarity warmed the site of our installation.

BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency) organized a great rally for the homeless attended by many homeless people and their supporters. Taking place during national Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, the rally provided a place to remember those who had died in the past year and to demand rights for those living on the streets.

The arch went up in record time; we built it in 20 minutes! We wanted to be fast because it was the first time we had built one in front of such a public building. The speed was made possible by the expertise of those who had built many previous arches with me, the willing hands of many others, and the support of all present at the rally.

To make the arch, we lined up the carts on the ground, bound them tightly with plastic zip ties, and then lifted the entire structure into the air. This lifting is the most exciting part of the process and took the coordinated effort of 20-25 people.

There were some shaky moments when we raised the assembled arch from the ground. The top two carts came apart as we lifted and the entire structure began to collapse toward the middle. Dozens of steadying hands held the structure in place while some tall people reached up to zip-tie the carts together. It was a great moment of many people working together to make something happen. The arch stood steadily at the end of it all, for the duration of the rally.

We knocked it down when the rally ended because of safety concerns. This was exciting because all of our previous arches had been knocked down by someone else (one was knocked down by Caltrans); this time we got to do the knocking down! It was sad, but appropriate to knock it down; the sculptures are meant to be as temporary as the homeless encampments they memorialize.

Past Memorial Arches

We built the previous five arches in abandoned urban spaces: places where a person or persons once slept. These places were empty for various reasons, all of them sad. The series of three arches we built on "the Bulb" (the Albany Landfill) marked the forced eviction from the landfill of a community of homeless people. Some of those people had lived out there for as long as five years.

When the Albany City Council decided that the situation on the Bulb had gotten out of control, they passed a no-camping ordinance. The inhabitants were kicked off the landfill, some of them were arrested, and their shacks and shanties were bulldozed. All that was left was a pile of shopping carts. This pile of lonely carts was the original inspiration and source of carts for the series of arches.

I met some of the people who had lived on the Bulb at the BOSS rally in Berkeley. They remembered the arch on the Bulb and now helped to build this arch.

The second site for an arch was under an 880 overpass in Oakland. Last January there was an intense cold snap during which snow fell on the Oakland hills, and Edgar Davis froze to death. He had been sleeping on the Oakland streets for 15 years, struggling with grand-mal epilepsy. His erratic behavior had gotten him kicked out of all the shelters and soup-kitchens, so he spent most of his time reading in his campsite.

While building that arch, we learned many things about Mr. Davis and the homeless community in downtown Oakland. A man who slept under the bridge with him helped us to construct the arch and to write an obituary for him, published in *Street Spirit*. [See "A Lonely Death Under the Oak St. Underpass," April, 2001.]

I built the fourth arch under the 24 underpass between Emeryville and West Oakland. This stretch of underpass is a crazy sort of urban no man's land. Streets from the poor West Oakland neighborhood stretch towards Emeryville and then suddenly dead-end at the underpass with concrete barriers and torn metal fencing standing between them and the giant chain stores on the other side.

This underpass has been a campsite for years, with many people living in a huddle of abandoned Caltrans buildings. Those buildings were razed a few years ago, following an arson attack on them by local youths. A few months after the demolition of the Caltrans buildings, the site was thoroughly cleared, as the windows of a new dot-com building peeked down on the area.

The tents, tarps, blankets and debris of the camps were tolerable only so long as they remained out of sight. But as soon as the desks and offices of DotWhatever had to behold the camp, Emeryville police cruised into Oakland, arresting and fining the inhabitants of the campsite, pushing them once again out of sight.

Outlawing and erasing the poor

All these arches are a statement against the criminalization of the poor and the systematic erasure of the evidence of their presence. From the many conversations I have had with homeless people at these sites, it seems hard to avoid being declared a lawbreaker if you have no home.

Laws are designed to make your life difficult, and the police often harass you.

Upon looking at the blank spots on the map, you find things like people sleeping inside cardboard boxes, children begging, men freezing to death. These spaces keep secrets, and are filled with invisible people.

You break vagrancy, trespassing and loitering laws just by existing. Putting things in a shopping cart and pushing it around is a felony count of possession of stolen property. Never mind the more complicated issues of drug and alcohol abuse. Addictions are often treated as a crime if you are poor — and as a disorder or a health issue if you are well-off.

These "crimes" of homelessness are not necessarily prosecuted. If the homeless are out of sight, they are tolerated. If they are hidden under the 24 Freeway in an urban no man's land, it is not a problem. The problem begins when the new, upscale building suddenly looks down at the squalid conditions, at people living in trash. All of a sudden the bulldozers arrive, the police arrest, the camps are cleared and everything is swept. Swept under the rug, and out of sight.

The arches are built in these areas of the city which we either don't see or which we consciously look away from. After building these arches, my eye has been drawn to the hidden spaces in cities, no man's lands where all the things we are not supposed to see take place.

Go to freeway underpasses near freight yards in any number of American cities: They are blank spots on the map. But upon looking at the blank spot you find things like people sleeping inside cardboard boxes, children begging, men freezing to death. These spaces keep secrets, and are filled with invisible people. No one knows the story there and no one is asking. If we see it by accident, we don't look closer. These are "the unseeables," America's invisible caste.

Homeless people are kept out of sight in order to keep us comfortable as we do our grocery shopping. Kept out of sight to stop us from questioning the next purchase at Macy's. Kept far enough out of sight that they don't threaten the sacred flow of money from consumer to corporation. What responsibility do the consumers have? They are just buying food! What responsibility do the corporations have? They are just selling food! Suddenly no one is called on to take responsibility because the whole problem is kept far enough away.

Another blank spot on the map

In the wake of 9/11 I have been seeking material to use in my second grade classroom to teach students about Afghanistan. My students and I (and most of the country) are vastly ignorant about this area of the world which the United States is systematically bombing. I want maps, books about culture, pictures, history, explanations of Islam and anything else that might open my students' eyes to that region of the world. I found nothing.

In my trips to the bookstores and libraries I have discovered another blank spot on the map, and I thought immediately of the homeless encampments under freeways. My impression of Afghanistan as a blank spot is reinforced by the coverage I see in the mainstream media — distant explosions, night-vision cityscapes. We do not truly see Afghanistan. It is a blind spot in the American ethical eye, a place where human rights abuses are somehow accepted as the cost of doing business. This morning I heard a report that a prison uprising in a POW camp had killed a CIA operative. The U.S. responded with massive bombing of the entire prison.

Our "war on terrorism" targets one of the poorest countries in the world because of its ties to an international terrorist. At the same time, we continue friendship with Saudi Arabia, where many of the 9/11 hijackers came from. Saudi Arabia has yet to condemn the bombings; so by Bush's rule, they are not "with us." But Saudi Arabia is far from being a blank spot on the map; it is rich and full of oil, U. S. businessmen, and military personnel. Afghanistan is poor.

The distance between the rich and the poor grows daily with the increasingly aggressive international corporations and their work with the World Trade Organization (WTO). As the gap widens, the poor fade from the view of the rich and vice-versa. We lose sight of the faces of those on the other side; we stop seeing them as individuals or human beings and instead we see them as "the Problem" or "the Enemy." The countries these Problems live in become blank spots on the map and we drop our bombs with abandon.

Look again. Whether it is a homeless man in Oakland or an Islamic country on the other side of the globe, a faceless, nameless Problem is much easier to deal with than a real person, with a real story. The government can arrest, evict, bomb, starve, and otherwise disrespect those who have been declared the Problem; but that is not compassion, that is not human. We are citizens of that government. If we stand by and impersonally witness the arrests, the bombing, the starvation and the lonely death on the street, we lose some of our own humanity.

These arches are a memorial and a protest. They are also a plea to everyone to reach out, have compassion, discover what we can to eradicate or bridge the divide. Begin by looking in all the hidden places around us and discovering the world we live in.

No Necessity for Homeless Survival

Santa Cruz court rules that homeless campers have no right to sleep anywhere

by Becky Johnson & Robert Norse

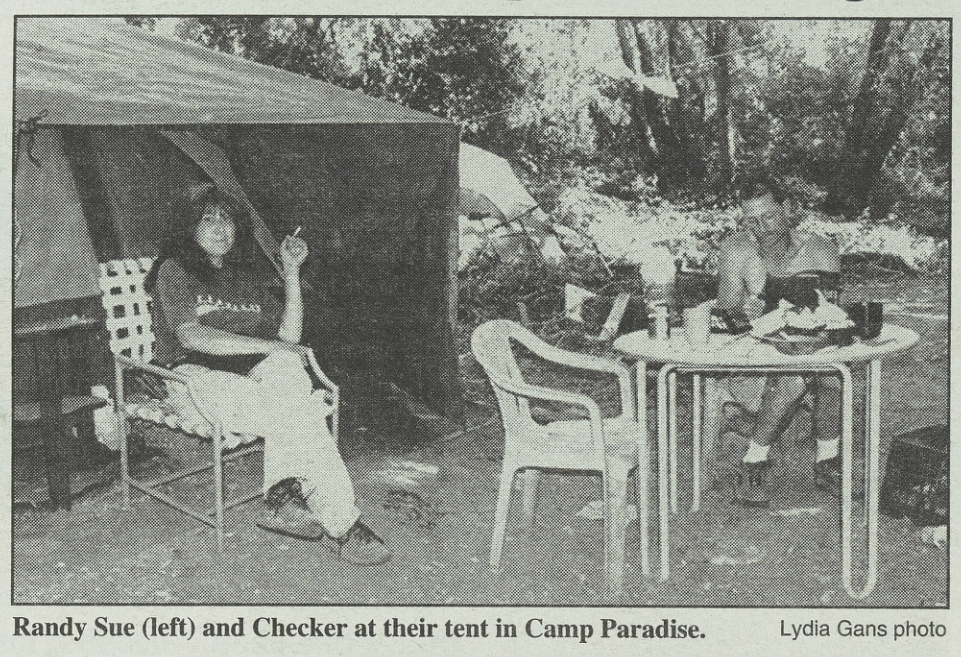
On August 3, 2001, more than 30 homeless people were ticketed under the Santa Cruz Camping Ban when they took refuge in tents, under tarps, and found safety near each other at Camp Paradise, the clean-and-sober, self-help homeless campground. The City Council, eager to disperse Camp Paradise, offered to drop citations if homeless people left. Many did, but the camp has held together.

Three months later, seven defendants appeared in court on November 21 in front of Commissioner Irwin Joseph. Pro bono attorneys Paul Sanford and Matt Williamson put in dozens of hours to defend the besieged homeless campers.

Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Pousho showed her lack of preparation throughout the trial, presenting only two witnesses for the prosecution — police officers. One was Homeless "Resource" Officer Eric Seiley, who has acquired notoriety in the homeless community for idle but intimidating threats (such as a recent one to violate a homeless woman's probation for "criminal camping"). The other witness was Seiley's immediate supervisor, Sgt. Rudy Escalante, who was caught but not sanctioned for conferring with Pousho in the hallway after witnesses had been excluded. When neither Seiley nor Escalante could identify three defendants in court, charges were dismissed for lack of evidence.

After the prosecution closed its case, Sanford first moved to drop all charges against the remaining four defendants: Larry Templeton, Kay Phillips, Jeffrey "Squirrel" Jeppeson, and Randy Sue Winchell. Kay Phillips is a 300-pound woman confined to a wheelchair, suffering from diabetes, arthritis and asthma, and with "zero" income. Jeffrey "Squirrel" Jeppeson testified he had "full-blown HIV and hepatic failure," and that "the doctors have given him only three or four months to live." Randy Sue Winchell, once a high-paid, high-tech manager at a prestigious software company, had become seriously ill, undergone surgery, and lost her job as a result. Larry Templeton, co-founder of Camp Paradise, was originally charged with a variety of what supporters described as "harassment" charges for "environmental violations" that were dropped or settled before this trial.

The peculiar wording of section "c" of MC 6.36.010 defines the crime as "Setting up or maintaining a campsite with the intention of spending the night." Other than in the case of Templeton, the prosecution presented no evidence of "setting up" or "maintaining." Commissioner Joseph retorted to defense attorneys that "the court interprets this section differently. Motion denied." But he never explained why.



Randy Sue (left) and Checker at their tent in Camp Paradise. Lydia Gans photo

It's hard to imagine anyone more distressed than a woman in a wheelchair with diabetes, arthritis, and asthma, or a man dying of HIV and hepatic failure. But the court refused to find Kay and Squirrel not guilty because of their medical conditions and the failure of Santa Cruz to offer alternate shelter.

Since it became clear that Joseph was not going to follow the clear wording of the ordinance nor even clarify what he considered the law to be, Sanford and Williamson dropped trying to prove their clients not guilty of camping and turned to the necessity defense. This admits the 'crime' of camping, but requires proving by a preponderance of the evidence that it was necessary to prevent a greater evil.

After a brief term in jail, Winchell had tried but failed to find a job in a recessionary economy. She had exhausted her savings on medical bills, payments, and legal fees. She found herself homeless and living at Camp Paradise on July 31. She was ticketed the morning of August 2.

Larry Templeton, co-founder of Camp Paradise, testified he was disabled and received SSI after having broken his back in three places in an Iowa grain silo accident. He supervised the clean-up of 24 tons of trash at no cost to the City. Most important of all, he provided safety, shelter, food, and community to scores of people by holding together a community of homeless people for mutual aid and protection — people otherwise unable to find shelter.

Santa Cruz's official homeless services program served only 39 people on August 3 (expanded during the winter to 114); the City's homeless population, by contrast, is estimated at 1300-2000 and growing.

Paul Brindel, executive director of the City-funded Shelter Project was the first defense witness. Speaking to the lack of alternatives, he testified that Templeton would "absolutely [be] on the bottom of the priority lists... as a single male with no major physical limitation." Even visibly disabled Kay Phillips would not be eligible.

Sanford asked the next witness, Ken Cole, executive director of the Homeless Services Center [HSC], "What were the chances that a single male, with no emergency medical need, would find shelter in your program?" "Very slim, very grim," was Cole's reply. "Their chances are almost none in the summertime."

In response, prosecutor Pousho gave no evidence that the City had shelter for any of the defendants at the time of their arrest. Cole even testified that his agency had informally referred clients to Camp Paradise. Templeton testified he found space for over 40 homeless people that HSC referred to the camp.

In what some regarded as "the silver bullet" that would prove the necessity defense, defense attorney Williamson entered into evidence a HSC form letter for defendant Jeppeson which read in part: "Jeff Jeppeson attempted to gain access to emergency housing from the HSC's Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program on August 2, 2001. Please be aware that with no other alternatives for emergency shelter, he has no choice but to camp out or sleep in a car. This situation is likely to continue all summer due to lack of space...." Cole agreed it was authentic.

The prosecution and judge both ignored the letter, even though it seemed to clearly show that Jeppeson had no recourse but to sleep outdoors.

Silver-haired and retired, Carl Wilson, a Felker St. neighbor and friend of Camp Paradise, summed up the change that happened a block from his house under Templeton's leadership: "From a garbage dump to a park!" he said, his testimony buttressing element three of the defense — that Camp Paradise had actually contributed positively to the neighborhood and not added to the emergency.

Templeton talked with a kind of horse sense that cut through bureaucratic verbalizations. Eager to please, but ready to fight, Templeton replied quickly to defense attorney Sanford's questions with a quizzical smile. In response to police claims that there were "open-air bathrooms," Sanford asked Templeton what happened to the toilets they had rented. "We rented a few and had them only two days when the City took them away. We rented them from D&G Sanitation." He testified they now "have 10 portable toilets."

Templeton's SSI income of $648 per month wouldn't pay to rent a place, but Pousho was skeptical. "You have no other income? Don't you repair and sell bicycles?" "No," Templeton answered. "We give bikes away to any homeless person who needs one. We accept donations. We take old bikes that ain't no good, take the parts from one and put them together with parts from another."

"Have you ever lived in legal [campgrounds] in the County?"

"Yes. But with this new 30-days-maximum rule, it makes it real hard." Templeton was referring to a recent rule change, unique to Santa Cruz, that allows park users only 30 days per calendar year in state parks in Santa Cruz County.

Jeffrey "Squirrel" Jeppeson, a slight man who dresses very colorfully, was

See **Camp Paradise Trial** *page nine*

Are the Greenbelts Just for Joggers and Polo Ponies?

Homeless people can be cited for illegal camping just for using a sleeping bag in the Pogonip, yet joggers and polo ponies are allowed to use the greenbelt area.

by Becky Johnson

The Pogonip is sacrosanct," trumpeted Joe Rigney of the Green Party of Santa Cruz County. "And I have a blocking concern if this language is included in the final version." Why would an environmentalist oppose a plan to clean up the environment?

At issue was a letter written by Linda Lemaster to be sent to the Santa Cruz City Council in support of Camp Paradise, the self-help encampment currently located along the eastside of the San Lorenzo River across from a tannery, under a freeway bridge, and behind a cemetery. The area had been neglected by both the local environmentalists and city officials for years as tons of trash accumulated. Junkies and alcoholics frequented this area which was rarely visited by the police. But now the environmentalists are insistent that the camp must go.

One proposal put forth at the City Council by Councilmember Ed Porter had been to temporarily borrow two to three acres on the extreme eastern edge of the Pogonip to serve as a temporary campsite where Camp Paradise could relocate. The newly formed Santa Cruz Service Corps (SCSC) would oversee the camp.

The Lemaster letter to be presented to the City Council was approved by the Green Assembly with all references to the Pogonip, the greenbelt areas, or to the Master Plan struck per Rigney's concern, despite the efficacy of locating the camp in areas where campers would be working to clean up the environment.

The Pogonip is the 640-acre parcel of greenbelt land purchased by the City and running between the City and the University of California Santa Cruz. (Pogonip is an Ohlone word meaning either white fog or white death. The Pogonip Club, which occupied the lower portions of the area in the 1920s, consisted of a golf course, a polo field, and a clubhouse serving alcohol, hence the word PO-GO-NIP for polo, golfing, and nipping. Experts disagree on which word the large greenbelt area in the northern part of Santa Cruz is named after.)

Santa Cruz has a lot of parks and greenbelt areas. While the city is blessed with nearly 2,000 acres of parks and greenbelt areas, it lacks the funding to maintain these parks sufficiently. Litter removal, trail restoration, invasive non-native species removal, poison oak removal, and the re-establishment of native flora are all required.

The Service Corps planned to establish a series of temporary campsites in the parks and greenbelt areas, and have the campers/service corps workers do maintenance work in exchange for a legal place to camp. The camp would move from site to site and do cleanup and maintenance.

The plan would be a win/win situation for the homeless campers and for the environment. The taxpayers would benefit from it too. And conservatives who believe homeless people should have to work to get a place to live like the idea and are supportive.

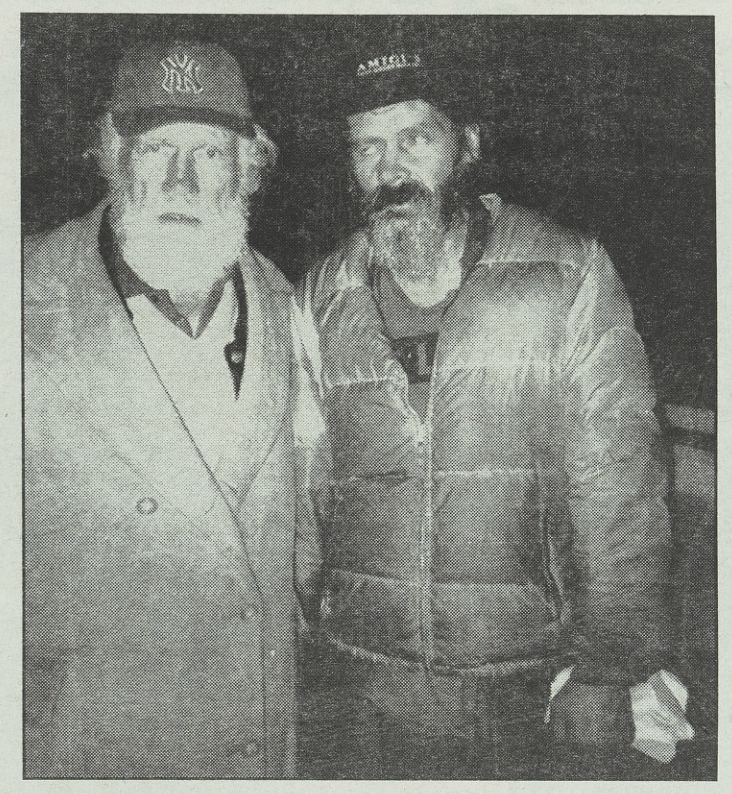
But hard-core environmentalists such as Joe Rigney, Patricia Matachek of the San Lorenzo Urban River Project Task Force, environmental attorney and Councilmember Keith Sugar and former Mayor Celia Scott were adamant that the council should never consider such a move. Despite all the environmental benefits the Service Corps could offer, these

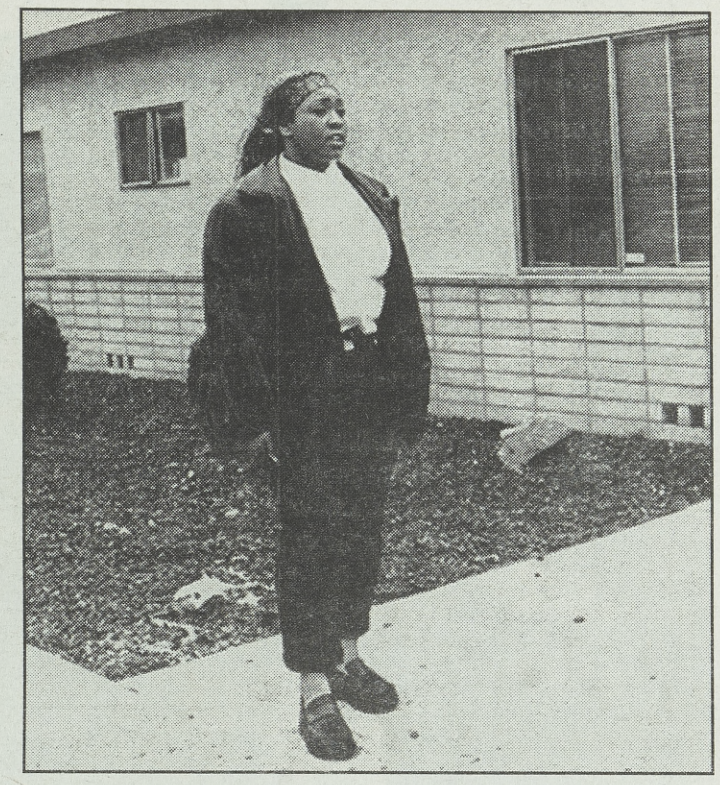
See **Joggers and Polo Ponies** *page seven*

For Rent: One Stretch of Concrete

Evicted renters and advocates protest a new proposal that removes one of the few tenant protections in Oakland.

by Isabel Estrada, *PoorNewsNetwork*





The faces of eviction in Oakland. **At left, Charles Burton and his son sleep on the hard concrete at Frank Ogawa Plaza in Oakland. At right, Kendra Wilson was evicted from this apartment after the roof blew off and the landlord expelled tenants.**

The evening light dimmed as I waited in Frank H. Ogawa Plaza in downtown Oakland. We were gathered on the steps of Oakland City Hall on Wednesday, November 21, at 5 p.m. to protest a new proposal from the Rent Board Task Force that would remove the 3 percent cap on annual rent increases which is currently the law, though often evaded, in Oakland.

Under the new proposal, rents would have to coincide with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor defines the CPI as "a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services."

Simply in meeting CPI standards, the annual rent increase in Oakland could rise to 6.3 percent. Then, to make matters worse, through Banked Rent Increases, which allow landlords who have not increased the rent annually for three years to make up the difference in one year, rents could increase by more than 18 per cent from one year to the next.

The proposal was first brought up in a meeting held by Oakland City Councilmember Dick Spees on March 25, 2001. The Task Force is made up of three landlords and Rick Phillips with the Rental Housing Association, three realtors, some Oakland city officials, a lobbyist for the Oakland Realtors Association (ORA), and James Vann of the Oakland Tenants Union.

Any possible reason why the Consumer Price Index should indicate rental prices in Oakland completely eludes me, especially considering the following limitations that the Bureau of Labor Statistics itself admits. "The CPI is subject to both limitations in application and limitations in measurement. CPI does not produce official estimates for the rate of inflation experienced by subgroups of the population, such as the elderly or the poor. The CPI cannot be used as a measure of total change in living costs because changes in these costs are affected by changes (such as social and environmental changes and changes in income taxes) that are beyond the definitional scope of the CPI and so are excluded."

The first person to smile at me and ask if I was waiting for the rally was Ms. Scott, a radiant, formerly homeless woman who became a permanent member of Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS) in 1997, working as a community builder and activist. BOSS was founded over 30 years ago by boona cheema to facilitate the transition of homeless and formerly homeless people into permanent housing.

Scott tells me that BOSS provides such services as transitional housing, shelter, resources and referrals, as well as mental health, alcohol and drug outreach. If the 3 percent cap on rent increases were to be removed, it would be virtually impossible for BOSS to do its work. BOSS generally serves people whose annual income is around $15,000 per year — barely enough to cover current Oakland rents and certainly not enough to cover an 18 percent increase.

Kendra Wilson, also a member of BOSS, knows all about greedy landlords and corrupt politicians. As she speaks, I am caught by her large, expressive eyes. A native of East Oakland, Kendra has lived there her entire 27 years. She is currently involved in a court case against her former landlord, Jerry Curtis, a Deputy Attorney General for the State of California.

The tenants in her former apartment building had been complaining to Curtis about problems with the roof for months before it actually flew off of the building in October of 2000. It was only after it had blown off completely that Curtis sent in the roofers to fix the problem. As it was the rainy season, the tenants' belongings were ruined during the time that they had no roof. The City of Oakland said that it was dangerous for the tenants to live under such conditions and so ordered them to move out until the roof was fixed.

All the tenants complied. However, once the roof was fixed, Curtis changed the locks, raised the prices and rented out the rooms to new tenants, making the legal tenants homeless. This is only one example of the illegal actions constantly performed by Oakland landlords.

As the rally begins, I see a man step into the circle holding a sign that reads, "The American Dream is not exclusive, everyone deserves housing." One speaker is mayoral candidate Wilson Riles, Jr. He calls the proposals of the Task Force, "socio-economic cleansing." Riles speaks of how those who make Oakland unique, the students and low-income folks, are going to be the ones "pushed out."

Geneve Allison, a doctor at Highland Hospital in Oakland, wrote up a petition in favor of keeping the 3 percent rent cap that was then signed by 14 other doctors and health care workers. An excerpt from the petition reads, "As professional members of the community, we see the effects of high rents upon an economically vulnerable population of workers, children, elderly, and disabled people. On a daily basis we witness the crisis in health that people experience when their housing situation is unstable. Lack of affordable housing can become an insurmountable barrier to maintaining basic health, while the stress of a personal housing crisis can greatly exacerbate chronic medical conditions."

Charles Burton also spoke, while his son stood quietly next to him. They live in Frank H. Ogawa Plaza. Their bed is hard concrete, in the middle of a cluster of benches. Burton recounted how he was recently hit by an AC Transit bus.

Because he is homeless and poor, the lawyer for AC Transit denied that he even had a case. Burton used to live in an SRO hotel until he was kicked out. Now he will be able to get a welfare check for disability, but even with that he will never even have a chance of acquiring permanent housing if landlords are allowed to raise their rents 18 percent in one year.

The eight pins in Burton's hip make sleeping on the concrete on a cold winter night in Oakland practically impossible. But for someone like Burton, the impossible is the only choice. Almost every night he is approached by a policewoman who asks him and his son to leave, saying, "The mayor doesn't like you staying here."

While I wait for the BART train at Oakland City Center, I look up at a billboard for "Spectacular Waterfront Apartments at Jack London Square." The apartments are freshly painted, and the ultra-blue water of the community pool sparkles like squeaky-clean glass. There are even a few scenic palm trees sprinkled among the buildings. The sun lights up the bright scene.

But these expensive apartments aren't destined to house Charles Burton, Kendra Wilson, Ms. Scott or any other renter in Oakland who doesn't have $1440 to pay for a one-bedroom unit, or $2495 for a two-bedroom. Until the CPI/less shelter formula is overthrown, there will be no peace for Oakland renters.

The proposal will be discussed in the Oakland City Council meeting at 7 p.m. on December 11. Anyone can speak on the issue but must arrive early and sign up. The actual vote will take place at the council meeting on December 18 at 7 p.m. If approved, the bill will go into effect on January 1, 2002. Please come show your opposition to the CPI proposal at the council meetings on December 11 and 18.

Joggers and Polo Ponies

from page six

few squeaky wheels prevented even a discussion of temporarily using two to three acres of the Pogonip for such a purpose.

And the homeless campers can't stay where they are now, either. Now that Larry Templeton and Camp Paradise have driven off the alcoholics and junkies and have removed an estimated 24 tons of trash, the environmentalists are showing an interest in protecting this piece of the San Lorenzo River's riparian corridor.

When it was covered with years of accumulated trash, buzzed night and day with the industrial noises of Salz Tannery across the river, mixed with the sounds and smells of the freeway which crosses the river nearby, no environmentalist voiced a hint of concern.

Homeless people can be cited for illegal camping just for using a sleeping bag while in the Pogonip. Since joggers and polo ponies are allowed to use the Pogonip, one has to wonder who is protecting what for whom.

The Pogonip, where an estimated 600 campers already live, had been considered as a potential site for the campers of Camp Paradise under the supervision of the SCSC. Dr. Paul Lee, a longtime homeless advocate, was promoting the program, had enlisted 30 Camp Paradise dwellers as workers, and could provide at least $50,000 in funding.

But environmentalists were apparently so opposed to homeless people using the parks and greenbelts that they rejected without examination a plan that is arguably good for the environment and can be utilized at a bargain. Acting on their behalf, Councilmember Keith Sugar led the council on October 23rd to vote to not even investigate that site or any other greenbelt site.

It has been a classic case of environmentalists vs. homeless rights, but it need not be. There is no reason eco-camps can't be designed and operated as just one more use of the beautiful greenbelt areas that surround Santa Cruz. To do otherwise, when it is clear no environmental threat has been demonstrated, is to show that the flag of "Environmentalism" is being waved to cover up the real anti-homeless bigotry behind the decision to exclude exploring the Pogonip as a potential site. Somehow the answer is always "no" when if comes to finding a place for homeless people to camp or sleep.

Celia Scott needs to stop her whispering campaign against the "dirty" homeless. She needs to publicly explain why she sabotaged even talking about using the Pogonip as a future site for the 50 or 60 people currently living in Camp Paradise. The public needs to hear reasonable environmental explanations why one ecologically sensitive camp cannot temporarily occupy greenbelt areas while they are engaged in restoration work, even though illegal camps without the same ecological consciousness are a fact of life in those same areas. Scott did not return a phone call asking for her comment.

If the Pogonip is unacceptable to Scott, Rigney, Matachek, and Sugar, then they need to tell the rest of the community where the people of Camp Paradise are supposed to go. Certainly they can find two or three acres somewhere in the nearly 2,000 acres of parkland for an ecologically-minded work camp for homeless people.

Becky Johnson can be reached by e-mail at becky_johnson@sbcglobal.net

Walking the Longest Road Home



Gitli, a musician and artist, sleeps in a hidden place on church property in Berkeley.



Edie, a homeless artist, dreams of a home for herself and her kids. Lydia Gans photos

It would be such a relief just to have a quiet, undisturbed night's sleep — especially now, as the weather gets colder and wetter and her body is sore and aching.

by Lydia Gans

The first time I saw Gitli, she was sitting on a log in People's Park in Berkeley playing a flute. In the midst of the hubbub surrounding a Food Not Bombs meal, her gentle melodies wafted through the air and seemed to make people feel a little bit calmer and happier. I found out that Gitli not only has musical talent — she plays violin as well as flute — but she also is a gifted artist.

Yet Gitli is homeless; she has been homeless on and off for years. In her 29 years she has moved frequently, had children and lost them to foster care, suffered pain and abuse, and is still wandering — dreaming of a better life with a kind, loving man and the time and place to practice her arts. Gitli's story is one of some joys and much pain. She was born in Switzerland and spent her early years with a loving grandmother. When her grandmother passed away she joined her parents, who were living in Germany. Her life took a down turn.

"I never got along with my parents," Gitli says. They did not treat her well and when "my daughter's dad came and raped me they forced me to marry him." He was in the U.S. military. It was a disastrous marriage. "It turned into six years of being battered," she says.

They came back to the United States where they moved from place to place. Gitli's life was miserable. One day when her husband was out on maneuvers she loaded her two kids and a few possessions into the car and left.

For years she struggled to survive. She lived for a period in Colorado, a hard time of struggling to hang on as a single mother. "I had an apartment," she recalls. "I was paying a thousand a month so I was working three different jobs and didn't get to see my kids, who were always with a baby sitter. Then I had to come home and clean the house in the middle of the night and get up early in the morning. Only had three or four hours of sleep a night all week long. Then my kids got chicken pox and I had to stay home with them."

She lost two jobs. Then she lost the third job when the whole office closed. She couldn't pay the rent, the manager gave her no slack, and she and the children ended up homeless. Her children were ages 7 and 8 at the time.

After that she resorted to camping with her children, first in New Mexico, then in Santa Cruz, finally in Hawaii. She managed to find supportive communities of other homeless people, but those things can never be permanent. In Hawaii they even organized home schooling for a group of children, but then "the cops found that place, and chainsawed down all the trees just so people wouldn't stay there anymore."

Gitli kept moving ever onward, trying to find safe places to stay while her body was feeling the effects of the heavy loads she had to carry from place to place, an inadequate diet and another rape.

Meanwhile, the children were taken away from her and put into foster care. She shows me pictures of the children taken on her last visit with them. They look sad.

When they were with her, she says, "they always looked healthy, had tans, good spirits, lots of energy, smiling faces. Now they look all pale, their hair all short, sunburned but nothing on the sunburn. I would put (on) aloe vera or something... Spots on their skin, all skinny and no energy to be running around. Then they're telling me I'm neglecting them. I would never allow that."

She sees her current stay in the Bay Area as temporary. While in Hawaii she met a man who told her of a community of artists in Amsterdam, Holland, and invited her to stay with him. She recalls his description: "It used to be just empty buildings and they squatted and then the government gave them the whole city block to do whatever they want. And they've made it really nice, a garden space inside, all renovated and painted."

For now, Gitli sleeps in a hidden place on a church property, spends her days getting food, getting herself and her clothes clean, doing yoga and tai chi exercises, going to the library to use the computer, reading and drawing. She is trying to figure out how to get enough money for a plane ticket to Amsterdam. Several times all her possessions have been stolen; recently her flute disappeared.

Gitli doesn't want to go into a shelter. She had one brief stay in a shelter and found that being in close quarters with so many women who, like her, were under emotional and physical strain from being homeless was too stressful. It would be such a relief just to have a quiet, undisturbed night's sleep — especially now, as the weather gets colder and wetter and her body is sore and aching.

She dreams of what might have been. "I would have liked to further my education," she says. "I would have liked to do things in life. I know I have talent and skills I could build upon, but where do I begin?" Maybe she will find somebody to help her make it happen.

ANOTHER ARTIST IN SEARCH OF HOME

Edie Rentschler is also an artist dreaming of a home for herself and her kids. She even has some money saved up; but getting into an apartment takes a small fortune, so she stays outside and saves every penny she can. In her case it was not an abusive relationship she was escaping — she and her ex-husband are on friendly terms — but she was troubled by the generally mean, hostile environment in southern New Jersey where she was living.

She alludes to crime and corruption and increasing violence which turned a pleasant community not far from Atlantic City into a very unpleasant place to be. She says, "It was a lot of really bad things happening around me. A lot of people are really traumatized from it.... It was a very quiet, wonderful town, (then) it was like it was invaded." She decided it would be best to "get going if you want to be safe from harm."

She packed a few things and got on a bus — "the hell ride across America," as she describes it — and decided she liked the Bay Area. This would be the place to settle, to find a job, a place to live and raise her children. "That's what this is all about now," she explains. "I've been working on it but it seems like I've had more obstacles than I planned."

It's hard to look for a job when you have no address, no telephone, no place to clean up and dress presentably. And it's hard to find a home when you have no job. Edie is outgoing and full of energy and quickly made friends, but it was too much of a struggle.

She describes her odyssey. "The first month I camped up here (in People's Park) among the eucalyptus trees. The second month I camped in Oakland among the eucalyptus trees with Janet and Gerald. Then I moved in with Danny which was heaven. That was a month and a half. Then between the women's shelter and Arthur's old apartment. I really wanted to get in there." But that ended in everyone being evicted.

When Women Are Homeless

Third in a series exploring the lives of women in poverty

She went back to New Jersey, not giving up on her plan to settle in the Bay Area with her children. She obtained her divorce and worked hard for six months, taking care of her children, now 11 and 13 years old, while holding down two jobs, seven days a week. She worked with seniors in a nursing home and with children in a pre-school, both minimum-wage jobs, and managed to save a little money. But it was too difficult, her living situation was bad, and she felt trapped and exhausted.

Now back in the Bay Area, she is still homeless, lugging her possessions from place to place and working odd jobs. She painted a mural in an East Oakland church. They might hire her back to do some more. One day her bag was stolen — another byproduct of homelessness.

But she is focused now and has specific plans. As a matter of fact, she sighs, she is very busy. With winter coming, she is pursuing every possible avenue to get into low-income housing. "I couldn't fill out forms fast enough," she sighs.

She expects to take the CBEST test and apply for a job teaching art. There is such a tremendous need for teachers and she is confident she has the skills. Then she can bring out her children.

Her eyes glow as she talks about having them with her. She can get her art work and some of her important possessions together. And she can bring out the cat and the dog. "The dog is going to love these cafes," she chuckles.

Breaking Through the Wall We Call NIMBY

Employment of mental health consumers and Contra Costa County's community centers add up to one of the most successful anti-stigma campaigns in the nation.

by Lawrence Gault

Mental Health Community Concerns, the nonprofit organization that for years has been working to establish centers for mental health consumers throughout Contra Costa, Solano and Napa counties, ran into the wall we call NIMBY shortly after finding a site in downtown Pittsburg in October 1998 for its East County Community Center. The Not In My Back Yard syndrome — a wall of prejudice against mental health consumers, as well as low-income and homeless people — was erected by the Pittsburg City Council.

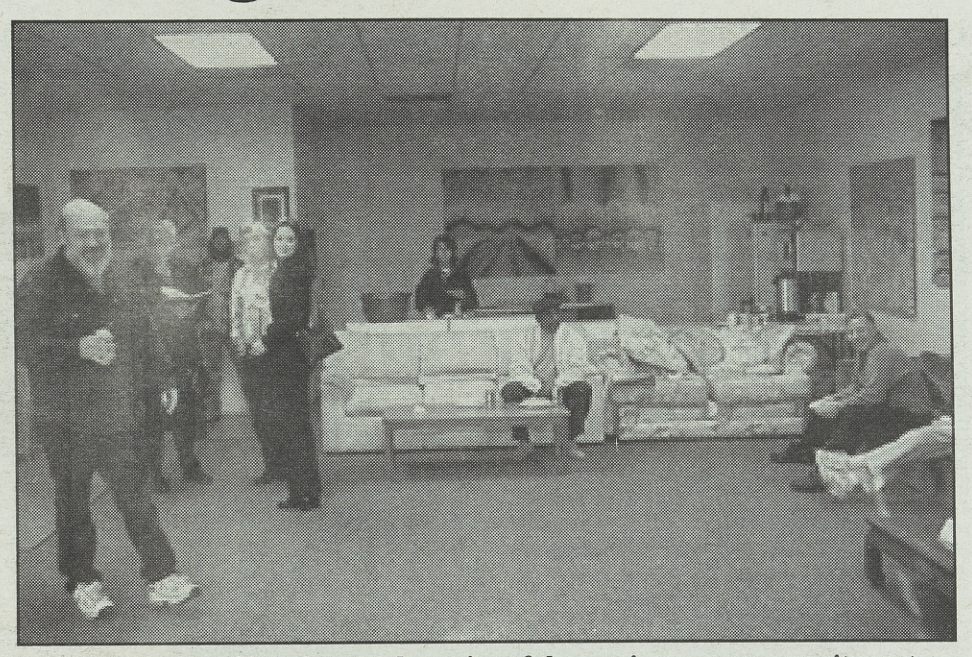
In May 1999, the City Council voted four to one to overturn their own Planning Commission's recommendation to give Mental Health Community Concerns (MHCC) a permit to operate the mental health center in downtown Pittsburg.

Rather than walking away from the wall of NIMBY, MHCC made the bold decision to sue the City of Pittsburg, with legal help from Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (PAI), a statewide organization protecting the civil rights of disabled people.

Too many times, the wall we call NIMBY has gone unchallenged — to the detriment of the mentally disabled.

The judge assigned to the lawsuit basically told the Pittsburg officials that he didn't want to see this case go to trial, and that they needed to sit down with MHCC and PAI and reach a settlement. After about a year, the City of Pittsburg came up with a plan by which they gave themselves a federal block grant to provide free rent, not only for MHCC but eight other nonprofit organizations, in a new building called a nonprofit service center. Many of the nonprofits would not have been able to operate or provide services in Pittsburg without the free rent.

Because of the city's opposition and delay, it took three years to finally have a grand opening for the East County Community Center. But from the time the process started, the stand that MHCC took against the forces of NIMBY was well worth it — not just for mental health consumers in East Contra Costa County, but consumers everywhere.



Lawrence Gault (left) at the grand opening of the spacious new community center.

The grand opening of our new community center went well, and we are happy to finally begin the work we started out to do in Pittsburg three years ago. MHCC provides patients rights advocacy for people placed in psychiatric hospitals in Contra Costa, Solano and Napa counties, and also operates four self-help centers for mental health consumers in the cities of Richmond, Concord, Martinez and now Pittsburg.

Much of the work MHCC does is based on the self-help model. Self-help is an old concept, but self-help in relationship to people with mental disorders is still relatively new in terms of acceptance by society in general.

In the 30 years that I have been involved in the mental health system both as a staff person and as a patient/consumer, the one thing I noticed early on was that some of the best advice, help, and emotional support I have received over the years has come from other mental health consumers, and not from the professionals running the system.

The idea of "us helping us" has always been part of the system, but it's only in the last few years that the system and the powers that be have started to recognize that by supporting consumer-driven self-help support systems, networks and centers, people are least likely to end up in the most expensive part of the system (i.e., hospitalization in emergency wards and psychiatric units).

For many years, people have recognized that some of the best and most dedicated drug-and-alcohol counselors have been former addicts and alcoholics themselves. For some reason, it's taking longer for people who have suffered from mental disorders to be recognized as good candidates to be mental health counselors.

The idea that recovery can also apply to the so-called mentally ill is a new concept indeed. Although the vast majority of people who have a mental disorder behave no differently than the average person for 95 percent of their adult lives, the stigma that society puts on the mentally ill is far more lasting than the mental disorder itself.

The stigma associated with mental illness is unlike any other type of stigma known to humanity. The understanding of mental illness by the average citizen is warped by Hollywood, the news media and family members who are demanding forced psychiatric treatment. The reality is that everyone suffers from one form of "mental illness" or another. Depression, worry, anxiety and anger are symptoms and emotions that all human beings have.

If you've watched much television lately, you've seen the drug companies' commercials selling drugs for depression and anxiety to the general public. Most people deal with their own mental health symptoms by talking with friends, church members, family, etc. For many who have been labeled "mentally ill," it was the lack of friends or a support system that got them labeled and placed in the system we call "Mental Health" in the first place.

Loneliness and isolation are the two key ingredients for serious mental health problems. The strongest tool we have to achieve good mental health is a healthy support system. Having friends and just other people who have experienced the same things in life is the best way to break the cycle of loneliness and isolation.

We call our places "community centers" — not "drop-in centers" or "client clubs" — because our centers are bases where the larger community can interact with us on our terms, and where we can show society in general we are more alike than different. The other major goal of MHCC and the community centers is the employment of mental health consumers and the recognition by the mental health system that we are valuable contributors to our own recovery. We are proud in Contra Costa County that we have gained acceptance by the mental health system, which now employs 12 former consumers and has agreed to fund four community centers that will provide more meaningful jobs for consumers.

Although it has taken many years, consumer employment and the community centers in Contra Costa County add up to what is probably one of the most successful ongoing anti-stigma campaigns in the nation. "Us helping us" is what true self-help is all about, and getting the system and society to recognize its importance is our best weapon against the stigma associated with mental illness.

Two people deserve thanks in this effort, for without their hard work and support of consumer employment in mental health, most of our success in Contra Costa County would not exist: John Allen, director of the Concord Mental Health Clinic, and Barbara J. Lyon, executive director of Mental Health Consumer Concerns.

Although there is so much still to be done in the state and the nation to advance self-help and end the stigma of mental illness, I believe that in Contra Costa County we have shown it can be done, and have provided a model of how to do it.

Camp Paradise Trial

from page six

next. But his demeanor was very serious. For Squirrel is dying. His monthly income of $787 per month ruled out regular housing on August 2.

"Any other possible legal places to sleep?" he was asked.

"As far as I knew, those places were full," he said.

Matt Williamson asked him, "Do you feel safer staying at Camp Paradise?"

Squirrel looked Williamson in the eye and replied, "Camp Paradise is the safest place I've ever been."

Pousho, in her closing arguments, insisted that the camping ordinances were constitutional, that the campers were in a sensitive river area (something about which she'd presented no evidence), and that there were serious health and safety hazards for campers during the winter again providing no alternative suggestions for them). She made little or no refutation of any of the necessity defense claims, other than simply asserting they weren't so.

It's hard to imagine anyone more distressed than a woman in a wheelchair with diabetes, arthritis, and asthma, or a man dying of HIV and hepatic failure. But Commissioner Joseph refused to grant defense motions that Kay and Squirrel be found not guilty immediately because of their medical conditions and the failure of the City to offer alternate shelter.

In his closing statement, Sanford eloquently refuted Commissioner Joseph's skepticism about how long an emergency can last. "An emergency can continue for four months," Sanford said. "If an emergency exists today and tomorrow nothing changes, then yes... We can't say to Jeffrey Jeppeson, 'I'm sorry, you've been HIV-positive for too long.' "

To Joseph's concern that some campers had been given prior notice and ought to have left, Sanford replied that prior notice was irrelevant to the necessity defense — that the dire economic situation doesn't change because a camper is given notice. "The City Attorney was unable to show any, not any likelihood, not any possibility [of another place to go]," he said. Simply informing them that their life-sustaining behavior was illegal was beside the point. Sanford's uncontested claim that the defendants had made reasonable and diligent efforts to find shelter and found none available was ignored by both judge and prosecution.

Sanford summed up for the defense: "The significant evil for those with no legal place to go was... bodily harm. Sleep is a physiological need. We heard testimony that a homeless person is three to five times more likely to be victims of violent crime — that's 300 percent to 500 percent more likely to be raped, bludgeoned, or killed. The City Attorney has presented no evidence that they had legal options. The individuals have testified they had no other place to stay, no legal place. We heard testimony that we have over 1200 homeless people and less than 100 beds. None of the defendants were making more than $800 per month. There are no legal campsites in the city. The City police are offering a place outside of Santa Cruz to go? Case law is clear. You cannot foist your homeless population on nearby localities."

In a stark appeal to prejudice, Pousho concluded for the prosecution, "What you are proposing, that if you don't have housing, you can set up camp wherever you want to... is a slippery slope in which, if you find the defendants not guilty by reasons of necessity, homeless people from all over the nation, well, all over the State of California will come and set up camp wherever they want..."

Pousho was singing the judge's tune. The Court's ruling five days later provoked exclamations of disbelief and disgust. Commissioner Joseph wrote that "establishment of a campsite, relatively permanent in nature, is not a 'necessity-justified' response to the homeless condition in Santa Cruz... Santa Cruz is an expensive place to live... The failure of the legislative branch of local government to provide a remedy does not affect the task given the court."

Without specifying what they were, Joseph claimed "alternatives to Camp Paradise do exist." He ignored the unsafe situation of homeless people sleeping alone, and found all the defendants both guilty beyond a reasonable doubt and not entitled to the necessity defense. Then, acknowledging the glaring disabilities of Phillips and Jeppeson, he suspended their sentences. In conclusion, he declared that Templeton and Winchell had already served their community service through their many hours of work for the community.

"What alternatives is he talking about?" asked one journalist. "Suicide? Walking around all night? Leaving town?"

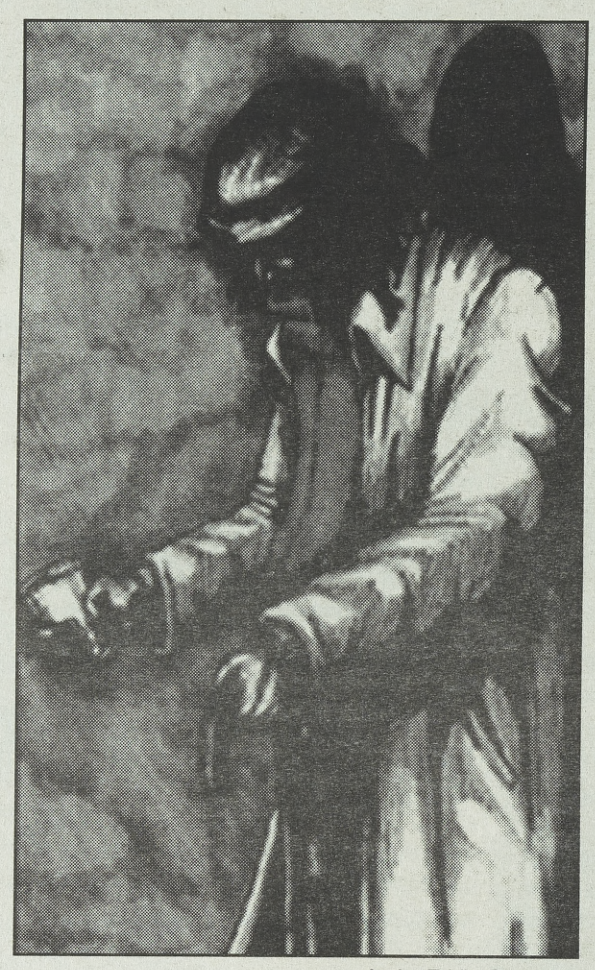
Following the verdict, Camp Paradise founder Templeton announced the four "campcriminals" would return to their tents that night. "We have no other choice."

Contact Becky Johnson (831/429-8529 or becky_johnson@sbcglobal.net) and Carl Wilson of Friends of Camp Paradise (831/425-4787 or rudio@cruzio.com) for more information.

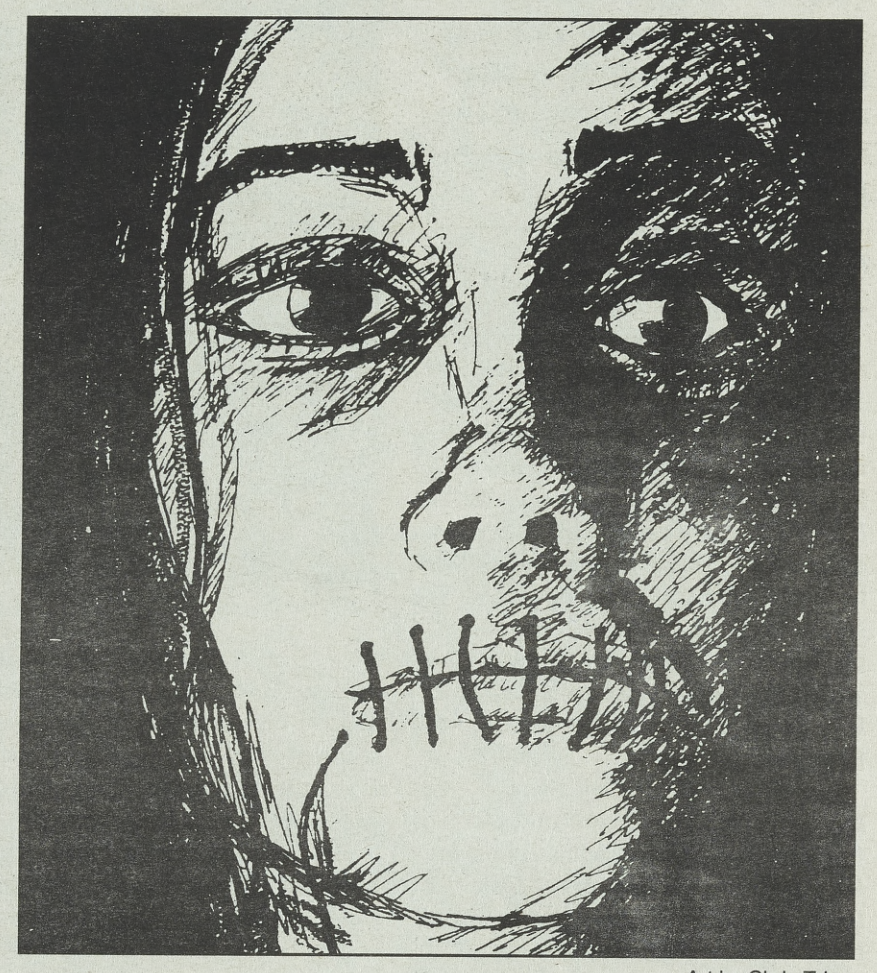
When Words Fight Back

Po' Poets fight to overcome the silencing of the poor and the shame attached to poverty

by Isabel Estrada, *PoorNewsNetwork*



Art by Eddie Camacho



Art by Chris Trian

Po' Poets create art to rebel against the many ways that society silences and censors the voices of poor and homeless people.

I walk into the wide, white space that is The Lab Art Gallery in San Francisco and feel the HipHop and Reggae beats coming from DJ Sakel proliferate within me. Po' Poet Keith Savage carries in the heavy rows of chairs that begin to fill slowly as people step in out of the rain. People are still busy getting bread and butter when Latifah Simon, the MC for the night, tells everybody to take a seat. She has cafe-con-leche skin and a pile of braids on her head.

"Welcome to the Po' Poets CD Release Party," she yells. Apparently the audience is still occupied with the food because we don't really respond. However, by the third time Latifah repeats herself, we get the message and lend our support in the form of claps and shouts.

As Tiny, co-editor of *POOR Magazine* and co-director of the Media Studies Program which encompasses the Po' Poets Project, steps up to the stage she looks somewhat shy despite her high black boots, fishnet tights, and sleek black skirt. The light reflects off her bleached-blond streaks of hair as her eyes fall to the ground. "We're all family here, it's all good," she assures herself and Leroy Moore, co-facilitator of the Po' Poets Project, standing next to her.

An important part of *POOR Magazine* is attempting to eradicate the shame that comes with homelessness and poverty. The way we achieve this in the Community Newsroom at POOR, a non-hierarchical approach to newsmaking, is that when we introduce ourselves we also tell the group about whether or not we have experienced poverty or any other form of systemic oppression.

Leroy, in matching brown jacket and boots, goes directly to the mic and erases any possible confusion by saying, "The Po' Poets are Poor Poets! Our blood is our community!" Tiny jumps in, adding, "The people who are dealing with oppressive systems are the scholars at POOR. The Po' Poets is another form of journalism, organic journalism, street journalism."

Tiny is speaking about the Scholarship of Poverty. A fundamental belief at POOR, the Scholarship of Poverty suggests that those people living through and resisting poverty are the experts where their own lives are concerned. And, because they are the experts, they should be the ones writing their own news, not the biased, inexperienced, mainstream media. And through their words they become human to the world, instead of remaining mere statistics.

All the poets gather onto the stage as they begin their slam bios (biographies turned into poetry). Leroy begins by coming down off the stage and getting face to face with the audience. "Hahaha," he laughs ironically, "what do you see, what do you see? Nigger with disability, revolutionary Poet." Leroy can't stand still as he is bursting with energy.

Jewnbug is next; when she begins to speak, her sweet face contorts with anger. "Mixed heritage, workin' for change, sellin' my food stamps, frustrated with the upper class who wanna save my ass, sleep in an SRO," she yells phrase after phrase with squinted, sad eyes. Dharma, the woman with a serene and playful look in her eyes, stands with her back to the audience. "I am a woman of the real world," she says in a soft voice. "My goals are to rise up out of poverty… as life changes constantly, taking back my space and time."

Joe Bolden steps off the stage with his usual humble yet sophisticated air. He spreads his arms wide and begins, "I'm Joe, in an SRO, it ain't good though, survivin', thrivin', I flow." A. Faye Hicks speaks next, "I'm a lady of the shelter, I have met a thousand people and yet am all alone."

Mari Villaluna, one of the youth Po' Poets, comes to the center of the room with energy; you can see some sparkles on her face reflecting in the light. As she speaks her arms are outstretched. "18-23 that's what you call me... I am a poet... I am a leader of today." Viviana Martinez, a small woman with wild, dark hair, comes up next. She says, "I am the terror, the terror of the capitalist system, I am the terror that comes from across the sea."

Keith Savage states with an all-encompassing, deep voice, "I am the surprise, so open the surprise in the cardboard box." Aldo Della Maggiora, who was on the congas throughout the night, adds his words to the mix. "I'm a sandgrain in the desert of economic struggle and internal despair, resisting and determining my inner revolution," he says into the mic while still beating out rhythms on the drums.

Next is Tiny, her voice hard as she speaks her words, "Doing time for crimes of poverty. That's being homeless, being on welfare and being poor in this capitalist reality… On this earth to save the world and in the process maybe me and mines."

A whole range of topics continues to be covered by the Po' Poets. Mari speaks of how "I sleep, eat, and breathe" in transitional housing, even if she doesn't own it. She also speaks to how many middle- and upper-class people are also currently living in homes that aren't truly theirs. Homes that they took from lower-class families of color who were evicted simply because the landlords wanted even more money.

Leroy sends a powerful message. When he first says, "Look into my eyes," many of the people in the audience laugh; but when he repeats it, they realize that there is nothing funny about his words. "Look into my eyes, they will make you cry, wind blows like a tornado through these desert eyes." He continues, "seen everything, been everywhere." As he speaks he stretches his arms out to the side, making an appeal to the whole audience.

Tiny announces that they are going to do a poverty hero project to "honor ourselves and each other" for surviving through the constant struggle of poverty. Two poverty heroes stand face to face and do slam bios of each other. Tiny adds, "This might sound touchy-feely; but it's not, it's survival." A. Faye Hicks and Jewnbug look at each other knowingly and start to speak. Faye says, "Young bug, lemon-flavored skin, pain-ravaged eyes, golden goddess, she is spring water held in a coarse fist." Jewnbug begins, "Making fashionable attire out of alleyway clothes, African Queen, sunkissed chocolate."

Next A. Faye Hicks recites her poem, "A. Faye On The Judicial System." "I found out the truth when I became entangled with the court systems. You had to have money and the ability to twist the truth — lie that is. Being poverty-stricken I realized I had no rights as a Human Being. No one to defend me, whether I was right or wrong, guilty or innocent. Before the Civil Rights movement, they didn't even pretend to have a court then. The Lynch mob poured out justice in the dead of the night leaving me hanging on the limb of a tree, swinging gently in the midnight breezes. All the way to 2001, three strikes and you're out!" Her rough voice spits out her words with the calloused awareness that comes from living this harsh reality.

Next up is Coya, the full-time student, artist and organizer. She asks whether we would like to hear a song or a poem. I scream out "song" and I guess it worked because soon I could feel her rich voice inside my chest. It made my eyes water slightly. The words were: "Until our dreams are real, still we rise." She asked us all to sing along with her and recall that ideal world of our dreams, but I preferred just listening to her voice.

Tiny begins her next poem, "Crazy," with a song. Her voice almost breaks as she sings, "crazy, crazy for being so lonely." She speaks of her 23 evictions, "the clanking of the locksmith." How all her things that involved memories and feelings so quickly became "shit" when it was thrown out of windows onto the street. This was how her father wanted his young daughter to learn her lesson. He was "sexually attracted to my poverty." And it ends, "crazy, crazy for loving you."

Rico Pabon from Prophets of Rage gives us a little musical relief. Though his lyrics are harsh, at least we can bump to the music. "Violence and incarceration is at the very foundation of what this country is based on. Our children walking around with battle scars."

Dani Montgomery, another Po' Poet, speaks to another aspect of poverty in "What I Remember Most About the Hard Time." She looks happy and grateful, if somewhat sad while at the mic. "The neighbor who gave me five bucks when she had it and a hug when she didn't, The folks who helped us because they knew what it was like to stand there sifting through your pockets trying to think of explanations."

One poem that touched me was by George Tirado and was dedicated to his friend Lori who O.D.'d. "My room is filled to overflowing with junk dreams of you, all your angels now fall from heaven face first, no Lori, not tonight, and that junk high, it ain't like jazz no more and it ain't gonna free your mind." He was crying as he said these words.

The rap group Renaissance was next. They always bring intelligent new lyrics to whatever they do. "Technology provided, divided we die." "I see the purity of life shining through my baby cousin's eyes." The two men from Renaissance refused to use any background music because they wanted to assure that their words would be heard, not just the beats and rhymes. One of the young men stops for a moment and gives us a little lesson: "Don't get so caught up in it, your path is already laid out, we're here to learn." "You must use more than 10% of your brain to comprehend this shit!"

As the night came to a close, I was reminded of Leroy's and Tiny's words: "The Po' Poets are POOR poets, and we are all family here."

The Po' Poets Project CD features over 30 local and national poets and is available from POOR Magazine. To buy one, send a check or money order made out to POOR Magazine for $10.00 + $3.20. Mail to: POOR Magazine, 255 9th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. Allow two weeks for shipping. It is a great holiday gift. All profits go directly to Po' Poets.

See Poetry from the Po' Poets — page 24

A Healing Touch for Road-Weary Feet

"We all need to be touched every day," Eabry says. It's his mantra, which he recites to each client who sits down for his therapeutic hands.

Story and photo by Stacey Warde

When Steve Eabry arrives at the Prado Day Center in San Luis Obispo with his footstool and massage oil, the homeless clients who come here greet him as a familiar friend. He's the guy who massages their feet once a week. He does it, he says, because he believes in the healing power of touch.

"We all need to be touched every day," he says repeatedly. It's his mantra, which he recites to each client who sits down for his therapeutic hands. Each day, according to the center's manager, Dee Torres, as many as 60 to 80 people visit the facility on the edge of town, adjacent to the sewage treatment plant. Homeless patrons use the center to clean laundry, take showers, search the bulletin board for jobs, read the newspaper, and relax from the grit and grind of street life.

On Wednesday mornings, Eabry offers foot massage to nearly a dozen individuals who put their names down on a sign-in sheet next to his work station.

"He's busy the whole time he's here," says Torres. "It's a service that clients really appreciate. It's a service that they would otherwise not be able to access. It's a real luxury for them." More important, she says, is the fact that clients are shown they can be touched in a caring way, something homeless people don't often experience.

"I think it does bring them out a little bit from being anti-social," she explains. "A lot of these people don't have any touch or social action that's healthy. A lot of people won't even look them in the eye. So there's very little contact" in their lives. Eabry's massage is "showing them that they are valued."

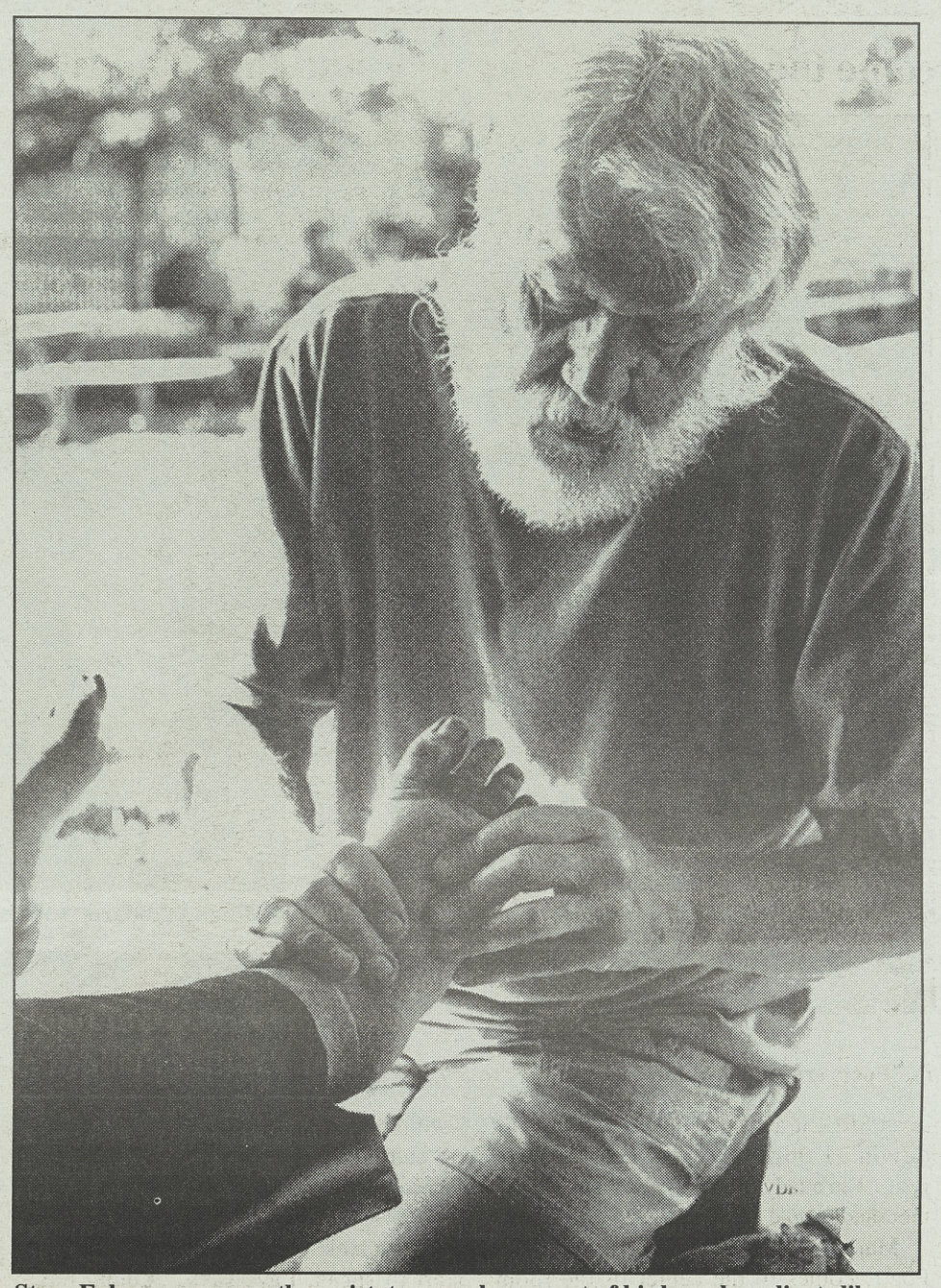
Seated outside on a small wooden Zen meditation bench, Eabry caresses the feet of a road-weary homeless woman. She's a familiar figure to residents of San Luis Obispo. Rotund, covered in grime, she grubs through the city's trash cans for scraps of food left over from hamburger joints and the barbecues of Thursday night Farmers Markets.

Near a window through which clients can be observed reading, napping and folding clothes, the woman sits quietly and comfortably in a second-hand armchair with flattened brown cushions. Her calves rest upon the footstool Eabry built for his homeless clients. Eabry carefully removes her tattered slippers made of red yarn, like two rags torn from an old Anne doll, and places them on the ground beside her swollen, calloused feet. Only her feet extend beyond the shade of the patio covering, soaking up the warmth of the morning sun. She eagerly presses them into Eabry's hands to enjoy 15 minutes of a rare foot massage.

Eabry, a certified massage therapist, towers above most of his clients like a gentle giant with a white beard, a prophet's bearing and a mother's kindness.

He specializes in polarity therapy, working with energy systems in the body to release the body's healing potential. Medical science, he says, can measure currents and electrical impulses of the brain and heart. The trained therapist can work with these same dynamics to foster healthy changes in the body. These are systems "that we can influence, prod and change for beneficial purposes," he says.

Eabry's clarion call is nurturing touch. The world, with its stresses and taboos against touch, could use a lot more of the healthy affections we seem to lack, he says.



Steve Eabry, a massage therapist, towers above most of his homeless clients like a gentle giant with a white beard, a prophet's bearing and a mother's kindness.

After finishing with the woman wearing the red-yarned slippers, Eabry gets up from his kneeling position to wash his hands. When he returns, Eabry checks the clipboard and calls for his next client.

Krystal Roberts, a large woman with her son's name tattooed around a butterfly on her left calf, seats herself in the chair before Eabry. Her feet are also swollen but less discolored and calloused than the previous woman's. Eabry places oil on her feet and begins to rub them.

Roberts explains that the tattoo on her leg keeps her mindful of her son. "He's in a foster home," she says when asked about her son's whereabouts. She turns her attention to Eabry, who will be leaving in a week for his annual 12-week tour across country. "You're going on vacation again?" She seems disappointed.

As he works Roberts' feet, Eabry explains why he likes to massage in public: "I'm trying to get more people to come out and do this kind of thing. Every body needs to be touched." He adds: "It relieves a lot of stress. I look forward to it every week."

Especially when she was pregnant, Roberts says, she counted on Eabry to make her day a little easier. "Yep," she says as Eabry works the underside of her foot, "every body needs to be touched."

Eabry adds: "In good ways, not with fists and angry words."

With one of the blue hand towels he keeps at his side, Eabry wipes off the excess oil on Roberts' feet. "Thank you, Steve," she says as she walks away and into the sprinklers that have suddenly turned on.

An older gentleman with a wiry frame, pasty complexion, eyeglasses and straw hat, seats himself next, careful not to spill his coffee. He asks not to be identified. He doesn't want anyone to know he's on hard times.

"Welcome to my office," says Eabry, who then asks: "Is it true that the first million miles is the hardest?"

The man, whose thin and bony feet are marked with yellow, cracked nails and fungus, laughs. He explains that he has had problems with fungus under his nails ever since WWII, "a souvenir of the war in the Philippines," he says. "They call it jungle rot."

Eabry continues tenderly rubbing the man's feet as if they were a treasured silver dish. As Eabry works the damaged feet, the man, taking a sip from his coffee cup, responds: "Oh, that feels so good."

On the sign-in sheet, where clients awaiting foot massage place their names, is the moniker: "His Royal Highness Mike Renegar."

Renegar is another war veteran. He suffers from a foot wound he received in Vietnam after stepping on a punji stick, a razor-sharp bamboo stake on which the Viet Cong placed excrement and hid in places where soldiers would walk. The dreaded device sliced through soldiers' jungle boots, piercing the skin of the sole, wounding and infecting their feet.

Renegar wears a black baseball cap with the 101st Airborne logo on the front and a green button with the word, "Heretic." He speaks with a slight stutter and is affectionately called "Airborne" by his friends at the center.

After removing his shoes, Renegar shows a dime-sized scar on the bottom of his right foot. "Punji stick," he says. "Every time I walk on it, it hurts. Especially when it's calloused.

"I've got Airborne infantry feet," he adds. "These are the only feet I've got." Since getting the massage, he says, "my feet don't hurt as much." He looks intently at Eabry: "For that I'm eternally grateful, Steve. There were days when I couldn't walk on my feet. I'm serious. It's made a big difference, one helluva big difference. Yeah, Steve d-d-does magic."

While Eabry quietly massages Renegar's war wound, Renegar, like a Pentecostal preacher, commands his foot: "Out damn pain!"

A young woman, Anita Brown, who stocks shelves all day at the Dollar Tree in San Luis Obispo, takes her place next. "Massage is a very important thing," she says. "It helps the knees. I'm on my feet all day." Her menial labor requires a lot of bending of the knees, she says. Thus, she's very careful about what she puts on her feet. She recently purchased a pair of No Boundaries running shoes, which she acquired at Wal-Mart for $10. "They've gotten quite a bit of mileage," Brown says.

She seems to know a lot about her feet, the healthiest-looking yet. She talks about the proper arch, a thick enough sole, good support. "Keeping your arches is important," she says. "Inserts with good arch support, that's what I look for."

She's grateful for the time and attention Eabry gives her each week. "You ever put on a new pair of shoes and you feel like you could walk a mile afterwards? That's what it feels like after" a foot massage, she says. "It'd be nice to have hands and back massaged, too."

When Eabry tells her he will be gone for 12 weeks, she responds: "Uh-oh, I'll have to have my boyfriend do it."

This is exactly Eabry's goal: To encourage touch among friends, family and lovers — and, in the rare moment when two human beings make contact, strangers.

Letter to City Officials

by Claire J. Baker

We are "dying" to write you:
you don't like the colors of our
blankets & where we choose to
lie under them? Cool.
Then powers that be, more
powerful than we, please consider
building some shelters on
abandoned army bases?
We could even help you with
construction, even sign a waiver
for any injuries that might occur.

Once we're housed, put us to work
baking bread for our fellow poor
in the City. Each morning, simple:
bus us into the Tenderloin, set us
free carrying 20-lb. bread sacks
on our backs like Santy Clauses,
handing out, resting awhile, working
honestly on streets we know well.
At a specific hour and location,
bus us back to our base for a light
dinner, a shower, some conversation.
Our lives are short, that would be
swell. Thank you for your kind
consideration.

Most truly YOURS.
(signed)
All the Homeless of San Francisco

Alcohollywood

by Loyd Skiles

Baby I ain't down
You know it's all good,
They sell liquor by the pound
Here in Alcohollywood

I'm stayin' in a shithole
Somewhere in the 'hood
Eat'n from a dipsty dumpster
Here in Alcohollywood

Cockroach crawlin' crost my face
I guess because he could
I'm nothing but a big disgrace
Here in Alcohollywood

Baby we don't have to talk
It's all understood
If Johhny Walker walked
He'd walk to Alcohollywood



Marina Perez-Wong and Natishia work on the *Urban Nature* mural created by Meridian interns.

Meridian Gallery Unlocks Creativity of Urban Youth

"I have been working with the kids, really listening to what they have to say, trying to figure out how best to serve them, to empower them to be their own person, to unlock the creativity and strength inherent in each one of them and to free their spirits from within the box of the educational system, of society itself." — Amy Berk, Meridian Interns Program

from page one

become community.

Citing these examples as a focus of Meridian's intervention on behalf of its youthful participants, the gallery's directors and artists bring a diverse blend of skills, disciplines and styles to an equally diverse group of youth at risk whose make-up reflects the wide range of ethnic and cultural variety that comprise San Francisco and the Bay Area. Marshaling the resources of Meridian Gallery on behalf of the young interns are its directors Anne Brodzky and Anthony Williams, and its staff of accomplished professional artists including Amy Berk, Fred Hayes, Diana Mars, Meagan Shapiro, Tree Williams, Cynthia Rojas, Marina Vendrell and others. Meridian's instructors are paid through combinations of grants and donations.

"Working on the Tender Hart (Hartland Hotel) mural was fun," said Canton-born Eric Chen. "I got to talk to people on the street who would come up and ask questions. I think that the mural is important because it will make people think about the hotel and the fire." Chen, a five-year San Francisco resident, volunteers eight hours a week as a gallery assistant and intends to pursue a career as either an artist or a dentist.

The nonprofit gallery itself serves as mentor for a group of talented, intelligent, but often disaffected youth who might benefit from the traditional college or graduate student academic internship model already in practice in 1996 when the Meridian Interns Program began. The concept for this unique service model was activated after co-director Anthony (Tony) Williams identified "a lack of opportunity in California for younger students to benefit from the world of art and artists."

Conversations between artist-educator Amy Berk, artist-grantwriter Megan Wilson, Williams and Anne Brodzky built upon this notion, extrapolated to include existent gallery programming, and to utilize the resources and energies of people and institutions already in Meridian's circle, thereby transforming the space into an educational experience where aesthetic instruction meets job training. Meridian Gallery has, to date, provided this invaluable opportunity to some 120 Bay Area teens.

"Here at Meridian we learn how to work independently as well as collaboratively," said Marina Perez-Wong, editor of *MYEEP Magazine 2000*. "Our staff comes from art and business backgrounds and are all well-educated and friendly. It is here that we learn the importance of art and how we can communicate through it."

Perez-Wong served three terms as a Meridian intern, helped paint the two large murals and is studying at California College of Arts and Crafts.

Acting in accord with the San Francisco Mayor's Youth Employment Education Program (which pays the youth a salary of $6.25 an hour), Meridian Gallery has for more than five years provided an environment where a creative arts experience could be made accessible to a cross-section of youth that might not otherwise have such experiences. These are also lessons in growth, communication and compassion brought directly to the community and not limited exclusively to what can often be a sterile and distanced gallery environment out of touch with, if not disdainful of, the real world and the communities from which many of these young people come.

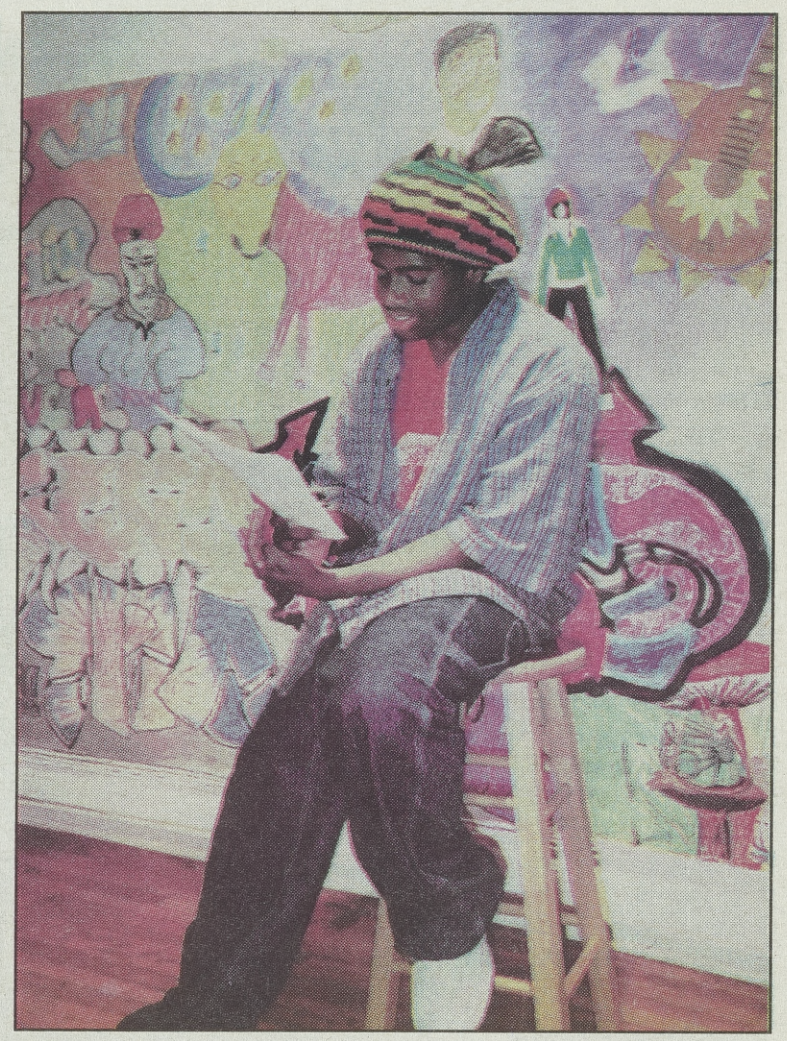
"In my drawings I try to recreate and explore the emotions that people have but can't explain or understand," said Devin Cecil-Wishing. Devin was in the program in its first year, returned for two more years as an intern, then served as a teaching assistant. He is an installer of exhibitions at the gallery and has exhibited his own work in two shows. He is currently studying at the California College of Arts and Crafts and working part time at Arion Press in the bindery.

Rounding out the initial focus on painting, quilt making, drawing, photography, writing, printmaking, bread baking, renovation and computer skills was an introduction to mural making and its tradition of community identification and solidarity. During the summer of 2000, Meridian Gallery co-director Anthony Williams was instrumental in gaining a site for Meridian Internship Program (MIP) participants to design and execute a highly visible and well-received mural called "Urban Nature" at the San Francisco Visitors Information Center at Powell and Market.

Building upon that success, a year later MIP artists and students began negotiations with the Hartland Hotel to create a mural at the SRO (single resident occupancy) building that had seen better days. The Hartland had gone through it all, from its days as a movie studio and boarding house, finally becoming a crack hotel and low-income dwelling. Most recently, the hotel was the site of a devastating fire in 1999 and a Phoenix-like resurrection from those flames last year.

This collaboration between MIP and the Hartland Hotel resulted in a design for an alley-side mural after weeks of meetings, workshops, student-resident dialog and artist-instructor brainstorming, culminating in a block party organized jointly by the Meridian Interns Program and the residents of the City Housing Hotel.

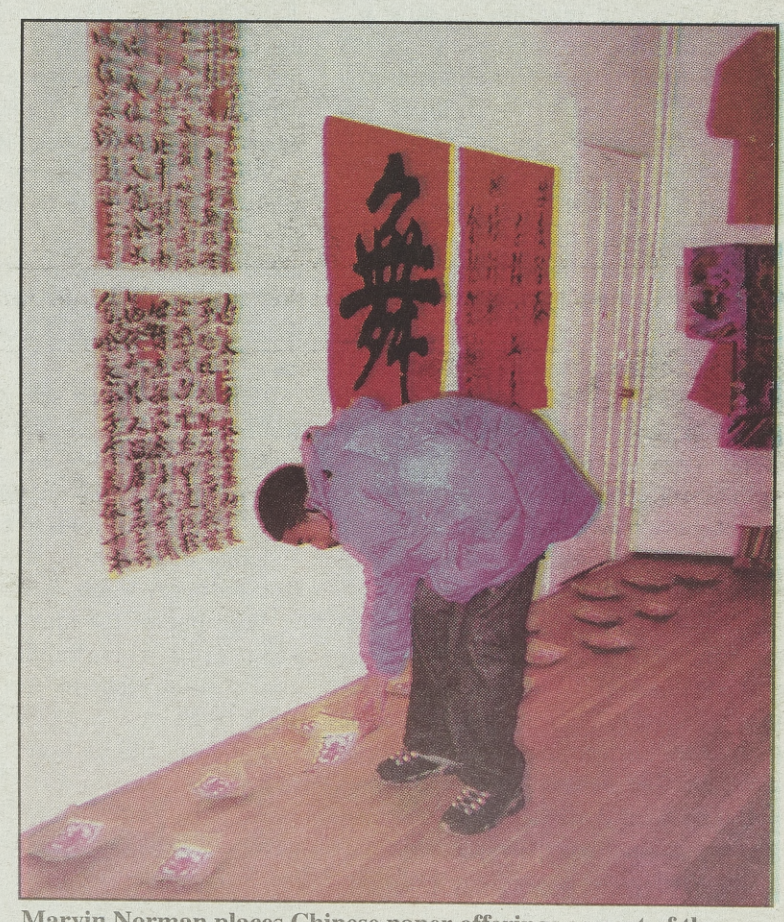
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William Standard reads his poetry at a Meridian Gallery event.



Cindy Mo with her persona depicted on the *Urban Nature* mural.



Marvin Norman places Chinese paper offerings as part of the installation of Anna Wolf's show at Meridian Gallery.

Meridian Gallery Unlocks Creativity

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What would make the most effective imagery was determined in part by reviewing the results of an intern-designed questionnaire which gave much insight into the lives and concerns of Hartland residents and afforded interns the rare interaction with members of a disenfranchised, yet resilient community of low-income tenants.

Viewing random samples of the Hartland Hotel Mural Project query gives one the impression that family, community and safety are common concerns for the residents, closely followed by a desire to see that things of beauty be depicted in the mural, even a tribute to former residents (Judy Garland and Billie Holiday rumored to have been among them).

"I learned to draw and to think more about what I want to do," said Cindy Mo, MIP participant who worked on the Hartland Hotel's Tender Hart Mural. "Instructions made work easier and I was able to think of a couple of things that I wanted to do on the mural... The hotel residents liked it; one older lady told me that 'you draw and brought joy.' "

Certain traditions root and nourish the continuity of experience each year for the MIP interns. In December they create a Holiday Coffee House event where they read a poem, perform music, or discuss a drawing. In April they design and publish a zine, the *MegaZine* for 600 other city youth working in MYEEP worksites. In May they are given the gallery for three days in order to mount their own exhibition of work they've made collectively or individually during the last seven months.

The dedication of gallery staff, students and instructors is apparent in the numerous projects, both planned and realized, and is seen in the enthusiasm and camaraderie exhibited at every interaction — be it the interns in workshops demonstrating musical technique and modes from Philip Gelb's Meridian Music Series or instructor Diana Mars offering special instruction to a highly appreciative Cindy Mo with humor and genuine affection.

Amy Berk, an artist, writer and educator, was the creator and coordinator of the Meridian Interns Program from 1996 to 2001. She said, "I have been with the program since the beginning, writing the curriculum, coordinating the instructors, working with the kids, and really listening to what they have to say, trying to figure out how best to serve them, to empower them to be their own person, to unlock the creativity and strength inherent in each one of them and to free their spirits from within the box of the educational system, of society itself. This is a wonderful program that has proved it has enabled youth to find what's good in themselves and share it with the world."

Carl Heyward is an artist and writer living in San Francisco.



The *Urban Nature* mural was painted by Meridian interns and installed at the San Francisco Visitors Information Center.



Meridian interns created this quilt, now installed at the Family Court in S.F.



Sadat Collins, a young artist, draws the first sketches for the *Tender Hart* mural.



Meridian youth paint *Tender Hart*, a mural at the low-income Hartland Hotel.

Creation of Quilt Also Inspires Young Poets

In 2000, all 16 interns hand-pieced a quilt which they called *Ten by Ten*. Jenny Tran, MIP intern, wrote in *MegaZine 2000*, "The collaborative quilt project was made by all of the artists and interns of the Meridian Gallery. After putting up Erin Algeo's show, which consisted of fabulous quilts, we set off and concentrated on our own parts of the quilt. The entire process took about two months to complete." William Standard hand-lettered his poem in gold around the satin border. Cindy Mo wrote the following poem for the *MegaZine*:

A Rainbow in Multicolors

by Cindy Mo

One lucky day I came to Meridian Gallery.
There was this beautiful multicolor of quilts.
It was called "Bitch."
One lucky time I came to Meridian Gallery.
There was this wonderful multicolor of races.
They were called "The MYEEP Interns."
Here! In this art gallery,
I believe I will have a good life
With all these bright multicolors like a Rainbow,
In my future.

What is Art?

A tribute to quilts

by William Standard, *MIP Intern*

What is art?
It expresses your feelings,
And can never be torn apart,
With its natural healing,
The way that
It moves people emotions,
Always helpful day by day,
Like a sip of magic potion,
Art can never fade away.
From the poem you write,
To the quilt you sew,
Always keep your art work tight,
For art's sake.
When you wake in
The morning and open your eyes,
Your life is made of art around you,
To understand such precious things
Can't be a surprise
In this world for me and you,
Like the thread on cloth,
The combination which it holds,
Art will never slow
You down like a sloth.
Art will always stay
Strong and bold.

Meridian Youth Need Your Support!

Meridian Gallery, Meridian Interns Program, and Meridian Music are interrelated programs of the Society for Art Publications of the Americas (SAPA), a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting understanding through art. We would be grateful for tax deductible donations of any size to support and sustain this work. Please make donations payable to SAPA and send to 545 Sutter St., Suite 201, San Francisco CA 94102. Telephone (415) 398-7229. E-mail: clafouti@earthlink.net. Web: www.meridiangallery.org. Thanks!

THE GOOD LAWYER

Top Gun will be grateful and say he loves him and tell everyone he's the people's lawyer. He'll feel good and energized by the love. That and a dollar will get him a cup of coffee.



Art by Osha Neumann

This legal brief is as bad as anything he's done. He's no longer capable of writing acceptable legalese. Phrases keep popping in, inappropriate, shocking, as if he was suffering from Tourette's syndrome. He rambles, without citation, about justice, racism, the jails full of the poor.

Fiction by Osha Neumann

"Man, I'm really sorry to bother you…"

Top Gun is calling from a phone booth — collect as usual. Rittman can hear the traffic noises in the background.

"Rittman?"

"Yah?"

"I got to see you? Can you come down?"

Rittman doesn't say anything.

"Rittman you there? Rittman."

"Yah, Top, I'm here, but I'm real busy right now."

"I know man, but see, it happened again with the same fucking cop. They took all my stuff, and my sleeping bag. They wouldn't even give me back my fucking I.D. And they got Nutmeg for warrants, and she's sick and…"

"Top, there's nothing I can do…" Rittman is ruffling through papers, continuing the search for the file he'd been looking for before the phone rang.

"If you'd just come down for a minute, I could explain it to you. You could get in to see Nut. You're a lawyer. I've got this note for you to give her. Please. The public offender ain't worth shit. She's got to get out. You know how paranoid she gets in jail…"

Rittman stops searching for the file. He looks at his watch. It's almost four. The day's already shot. He should tell Top *Gun to get fucked. There's an opposition* to a motion he's got to finish for a hearing tomorrow at 9:00.

He sighs into the phone so Top knows what kind of a sacrifice he's making. "All right," he says, "I'll see you in about three-quarters of an hour."

Why? Why does he do this? Why did he take on in the role of the "good" lawyer? Who is it for? What's he trying to prove? He'll meet Top at his usual spot in front of The Bistro and he'll find out that the problem is about five times worse than it's been described, and will take about ten times more work than he wants to put into it. He sighs, this time for his own benefit. Top will be enormously grateful and say he loves him and tell everyone he's the people's lawyer, and he'll feel good and energized by the love. That and a dollar will get him a cup of coffee.

Rittman's been practicing out of his living room for about three months, ever since he fell hopelessly behind on the rent and got the boot from the office he was sharing with a guy who specialized in car accidents and slip and falls. In some ways it's not so bad. He can roll out of bed and get to work. The only trouble is the work is eating his apartment alive. He's drowning in paper. Files are spilling out everywhere, all over the floor, the couch, the coffee table.

He's writing phone messages on the borders of the newspaper, on flyers, on unopened envelopes. And it won't stop. And none of it's making money. None of it. And still his phone rings off the hook and still he can't say no.

His dog, Nolo, comes into the room, stopping to scratch her near-naked tail. She looks like an armadillo. Flea allergy. "You and me, both being eaten alive," he says to her. "I should give you a bath."

But he doesn't have time.

He shuffles through a pile of papers on his desk for stuff he wants to take to the Copycat next to the Bistro. If he's going out to meet Top he might as well get some copying done. He packs the papers in his briefcase and heads out the door, careful to avoid the rotten front step he almost killed himself on last week.

His car is just down the block. The driver's door has been stuck since he got sideswiped by a kid in a new Camaro without insurance. He slides in from the passenger's side, dislodging a pile of files which fall onto the floor on top of a mound of discarded fast-food containers. He turns the key in the ignition and eases out of the parking space.

As expected, it takes an hour finding Top and making sense of his story. It takes two hours more getting to see Nutmeg. It's almost dark when he returns home. He drops his papers in a pile on the couch and takes Nolo out for his evening walk. They head for the empty lot at the top of the hill, Nolo scratching, digging, and poking curiously along the way.

Rittman looks out at the lights of the City. He knows his friends, all more successful, all managing somehow, worry about him. Truth be told he's worried about himself. He's sick of the law. Sick of judges. Sick of clients. Sick of all the rules. And there's no way out.

Next morning, late for court, he catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His thin face with its prominent nose is getting beakier as the years go by. He's forgotten to shave. His collar is missing a button. He realizes he doesn't even care enough to keep up appearances.

In the corridor outside Department One, he meets his client, Sweetone, a saxophone player, busted in BART for playing without a license. Rittman's suing for violation of constitutional rights. He glances over at a cluster of lawyers, among them opposing counsel who nods at him. The sight of them all fills him with despair. They look like they've been run off an assembly line, oiled, outfitted, then sent into the world to do damage and make money. They all come from offices adorned with secretaries and receptionists. They've got carpets on their floors and well-appointed conference rooms. Their stationary has many names on the masthead. He used to like going up against these firms — and winning sometimes. But now, it's not the same. Only the bitter anger remains, which occasionally be can rub into a passionate futile flame.

The bailiff opens the doors to the courtroom. Rittman goes to the clerk, and files his opposition brief. It was due a week ago but perhaps he can wheedle it into the record. He hands a copy to the BART lawyer. There are smudges and coffee stains on the title page.

This brief is as bad as anything he's done lately. He's no longer capable of writing acceptable legalese. Phrases keep popping in, inappropriate, shocking, as if he was suffering from Tourette's syndrome. He rambles, without citation, about justice, racism, the jails full of the poor.

The judge takes the bench. Rittman dozes through *Lathrop vs. Home Savings*, *Lillianthal Inc. vs. State Farm* and a few others whose names he doesn't catch. Finally it's the turn of *Sweetone vs. BART*.

"I have no opposing papers from you," says the judge.

"Judge, I just filed them, and if you'll take a moment…"

The BART lawyer is having his predictable fit. "Your honor, I was just handed these, I've had absolutely no notice…"

The judge is nodding his head. "Mr. Rittman, you know the rules."

"Judge, I know the rules. But judge, BART is papering me to death, and frankly, Mr. Sweetone can't afford a ton of paper. And we don't need it. Judge, just listen to him play. I've read opposing counsel's papers about music being a nuisance. Judge, Sweetone's horn speaks…"

"Mr. Rittman," the judge interrupts, "I'm not going to allow you to put on a concert. I'm going to reschedule this hearing for two weeks. Next."

Rittman gathers up his papers and heads for the door.

He should get back to work but it's a beautiful day. Fresh white clouds skim in from the ocean. Leaves are sprouting on the clubfooted trees in Civic Center plaza. Male pigeons ruffle their iridescent neck feathers to attract the blasé females. He wanders through the plaza, over to where the Food Not Bombs people are setting up their folding tables. Across the street a half-dozen cops lounge on their Hondas, preparing for the bust.

A couple dozen homeless men and women, protected from the elements by layers of ragged clothing, are sitting on benches, surrounded by their possessions, waiting for the food. Past them rush suits and ties, pantyhose and heels. It's as if humans are evolving into two distinct species, occupying different ecological niches. Time passes differently for each. For the lawyers, time moves fast, and is segmented into billable hours. For the homeless, it stretches out slow and seamless. Rittman feels like part of neither species. He picks up a Food not Bombs flyer lying on the ground. "Everyone's only two paychecks away from being homeless," it says. He stares at the words, reading the familiar rhetoric over and over.

"Paycheck? I wish I had a paycheck," he says to no one in particular.

Truth of the matter is, Rittman has never much worried about money — until now. Home had been comfortable — a two-story frame house in Waterbury, Connecticut. Over the years his father, a history professor at a junior college, added a deck, a potting shed for his mother, a den in the basement. As a kid, he'd been scolded for rolling around in the back yard and getting grass stains on his pants. His parents had helped him through college. In his junior year he got expelled for taking over the dean's office in a protest against university contracts with the Defense Department.

He bummed around for a couple of years and decided to go to law school. When he graduated in '65 he immediately went to work in a collective of radical young lawyers who considered themselves legal workers in the Movement. There was always money around. Not much, but enough. It didn't take a lot. There would be benefits, and occasionally a rich father would pay them to get his wayward son out of jail. A couple of times they'd won some big settlements. He still had some of that money in the bank. Those had been great times.

After the Days of Rage, the murder of Fred Hampton, the collapse of SDS, things got tough. The collective fell apart. He'd married by then, and Gia was pregnant with Bernadine. They moved to California, broke up, and he did what he'd always done — connect up with the rem-

See **The Good Lawyer** *page 15*

The Good Lawyer

from page 14

nants of the movement and be a movement lawyer. Except there didn't seem to be a movement any more.

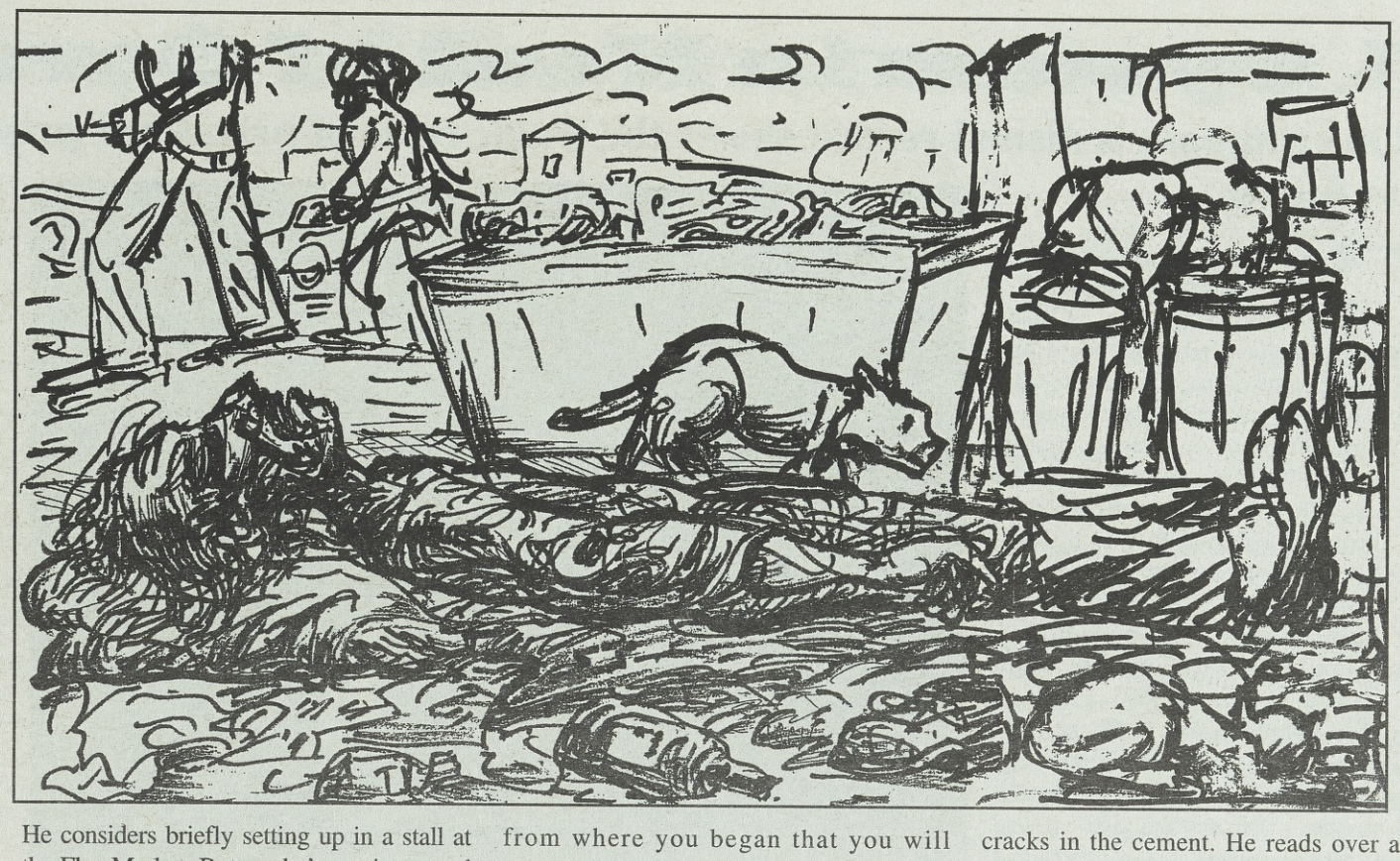
As the years went by, he felt more isolated. Every once in a while Bernadine, who was studying sociology at Bennington, would fly in to visit him, filling the house with laughter, and running up his phone bill with calls to friends across the country. Then she'd be off to college and boyfriends with a peck at his stubbly cheek, and a hug.

Rittman is roused from his ruminations by the sound of the cops' Hondas. The bust is about to happen. Rittman realizes if he sticks around it's all over. He'll never get back to work. He looks at his watch. Shit. Almost 2. As he reaches his car a guy comes up with a bucket and a rag. "Wash your window, sir?" Rittman doesn't have time, shakes his head no and immediately feels guilty. The guy wanders off.

A month later, Rittman quits practicing law. It comes as a surprise, even to himself. Actually the quitting happens in stages. He doesn't make a formal announcement. He just stops making his court appearances. The messages pile up on his answering machine till the tape is full, and they keep coming. He stops paying the phone bill — actually he just loses it under piles of papers and ignores the 15-day notice. And then the messages stop.

The savings from his settlement are almost gone. His credit cards are maxed out. He can no longer afford to keep the apartment. He rents a storage space and fills it with furniture and banker boxes full of legal papers.

For a while he tries to continue his practice. If he needs to do legal research he goes to the library. Someone once described to him the poor lawyers in India who squat in the dust at the bazaars, with their little tables and old typewriters in front of them, writing deeds and contracts and wills for a few pennies. He likes the idea of those poor dusty lawyers, one step up from beggars.



Art by Osha Neumann

He considers briefly setting up in a stall at the Flea Market. But no, he's not interested in doing law in any way, shape or form. He files notices of withdrawal on his few remaining cases. He's done.

Rittman is sitting in his car outside of The Bistro. He hasn't been to court for months. He can see Top Gun with a paper cup aggressively panhandling. Top Gun doesn't see him. Rittman had always assumed one became homeless because of some personal flaw — usually connected with drugs or drink. Top Gun had been a sergeant in Nam, took a bullet in his butt, came back and became a drunk. Nutmeg had been a carpenter till her back went out. She began using heroin for the pain. Brian had been a computer expert for the Bank of America. Then he got into speed. Chicken George had always been a wing nut. Secretly Rittman had thought, his flaws were not like theirs. Now he didn't know.

Rittman had no idea he would fall through social space so far and so fast. It's like he's living one of those dreams in which you fall and fall and fall, and then find yourself somewhere so infinitely far from where you began that you will never, ever return.

Although it all happens incredibly fast, there are markers along the way. At one point the ATMs stop speaking to him. For years, they had obediently spit out twenty dollar bills when he needed them. He had only to ask. "Spare change?" he would say to the ATM.

"Sure," it would answer. "Have twenty. Have forty. Hell, have a hundred."

He'd throw away the little slips that told him how much was in his account.

Those days are over. The ATM is suffering from compassion fatigue. A check of his wallet reveals his last crumpled twenty. He holds it up to the light and addresses it. "Ishi, the last of the twenties, I salute you." He puts it back and looks for a place to have a cup of coffee.

Three days later his car blows its transmission. He stacks some belongings in back of his old house and puts the rest in a shopping cart. He starts sleeping in doorways. His stubble becomes a beard. When he sees former clients he tries to hide. He talks to himself, and stares for hours at cracks in the cement. He reads over and over again the newspapers he pulls from trash receptacles. He peers into dumpsters. He has joined the hunter-gatherers, foraging in the waste stream of the suits and ties. Nolo is the one being before whom he is not embarrassed.

"Mr. Rittman?" A familiar face peers into the doorway.

"Nutmeg."

"What's going on? You slumming it?"

"No... I... ah..."

"No big cases, huh?" She laughs and gives him a hug. It feels good. "I've been calling you, but your phone's disconnected. I figured you were swamped."

"I've been away," he says, looking down.

"Well shit, come over to our campsite. We got a great place behind Whole Earth Access. The manager doesn't care."

"Ah... no thanks, Nut. Maybe later. I've go some stuff I got to do."

"Whatever," says Nutmeg, and gives him another hug. "I'll tell Top I saw you. He got another ticket from that cop."

CROSSROADS

Fiction by George Wynn

"Well, I was standing at the Crossroads with my head hung down and crying." — Elmore James

Below on Mass Avenue the anti-war protesters are drowning out the Jerry Springer show on the tube. For God's sakes, a man deserves an hour of laughs — especially a blind soul. Damn them protesters. Not that I don't agree with 'em. Them Afghans are poor like me. I mean, kick their butts a little.

The protesters are drumming on my head. Stop that chanting! My head hurts enough, not being able to see for twenty years. Nobody cares about blind folks who ain't famous like Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder. Look at Blind Lemon Jefferson — helluva musician. Died without a penny to his name on the street. What do I know? I don't sing the blues — I just feel 'em. I hate being blind. Feel like an animal smelling the scents of homo sapiens. Sounds are my king. How do those protesters look? Are they handsome, ugly... young, old? Hell, I don't know. Drives me to chain-smoking.

Now on Jerry Springer, I know everybody's crazy — especially those husky-voiced dames, no matter if they're young or old. And the mouths on them — even if they really are beautiful, they're ugly in my book.

Now I wasn't always blind. Eyes went bad at fifteen. That's why I can type, if you're wondering why I'm banging away at the typewriter. Best investment I ever made was two semesters of typing my sophomore year at Boston English.

As I type up on the eight floor of my public housing apartment in the South End, night is falling and that retired civil servant neighbor of mine is sniffing the smoke under my door. He'll complain to the housing authority manager about the smell. Last week the head honcho found a lit cigarette in my ashtray while I was dozing off in front of the tube. And this week, when the civil servant's snitches squealed on me about letting my homeless buddies crash a couple times a week, the shit hit the fan triple time. Now I'm faced with an eviction notice.



Art by Chris Trian, from *Beside Myself* by Julia Vinograd, Zeitgeist Press

Look at Blind Lemon Jefferson—helluva musician. Died without a penny to his name on the street. What do I know? I don't sing the blues — I just feel 'em.

My sister in Florida says I can stay with her through the winter. But I ain't got money. And I'm nervous about hitching alone. I ain't never thumbed without my roadie Pierce. And Pierce is recovering from double pneumonia. I'm thanking my sister for the invite but I ain't sure if I'm going. Might just flop in the shelter or squat in an abandoned building. Only life I really know. Pierce usually looks out for me.

Passers-by complain that the November skies are overcast outside the Government Center T station. I stop to buy Pierce gloves with the last of my money. Damn fool, treks through the streets all winter with no gloves. Imagine that 50-year-old thinking he's a teenager. That's Pierce. Never thinks about tomorrow. But then, that's what I like about him — he's gutsy.

Strange that Mass General is where my father and grandfather grew up when it was the West End. Well, everything comes to an end, I guess. Pierce looks bad. He looks like he's lost a lot of weight. He thanks me for the gloves and, between coughs, urges, "Screw up your courage, Billy."

"I ain't never hitched without you Pierce," I protest.

"Pretend I'm with you," Pierce wheezes.

"You really think I can do it, Pierce?"

Pierce nods firmly.

"All right," I say, "I'll do it."

Pierce shuts one eye and nods, gives me the thumbs-up sign and says, "Thatta boy."

"My sister says you can share the room with me when you recover."

Pierce clutches my arm. "Thanks, pal."

I start to make my way toward the door.

"One more thing," Pierce commands. "Don't be shy. Let them bikinied Amazons brush up against you when they offer to escort you across at the stoplight."

"See there, you always get me excited," I say, with my back to the door.

"You deserve it, Billy. Hell, you're human."

I chuckle.

"I'll be thinking about you, Billy."

"Likewise," I offer as I make my way out into the gray Boston afternoon.

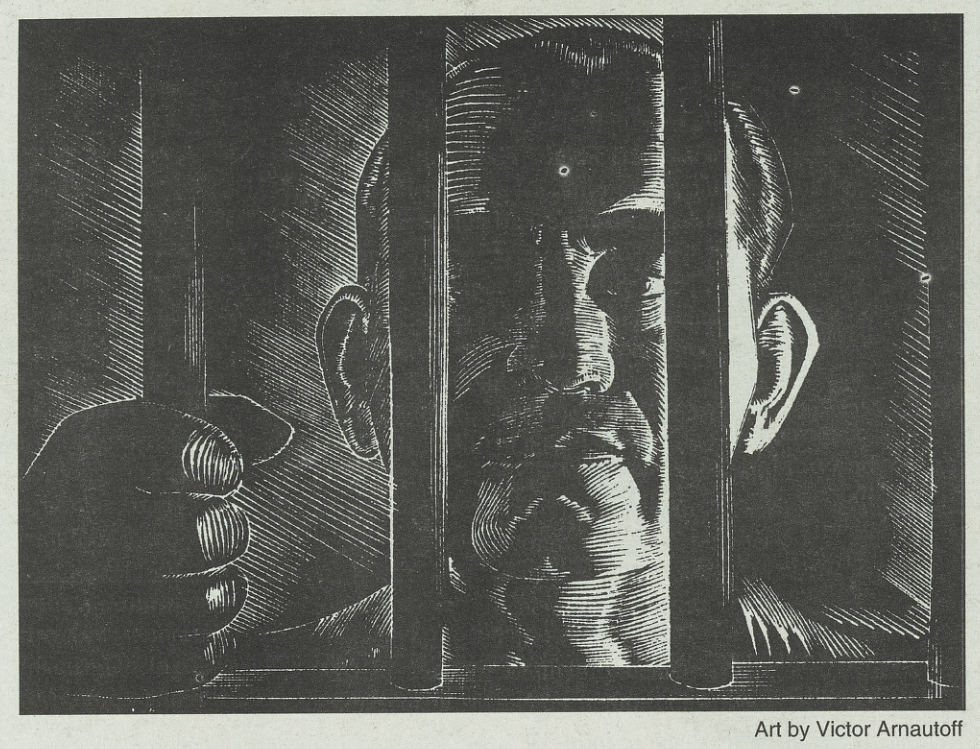
After dinner, I write my sister: "See you in a few days. Pierce will be joining us for the holidays."

Yeah, I'm damn sad about losing the apartment. But ain't no use getting depressed. Didn't help me any when I lost my sight. Like Pierce always says, "Negative energy is dead energy." So that's that. Time to pack.

A System in Need of Correction

One company's dismal record shows the tragic costs of privatized prison health care

by Bill Berkowitz



Art by Victor Arnautoff

An investigative report into Correctional Medical Services showed "more than 20 cases in which inmates allegedly died as a result of negligence, indifference, understaffing, inadequate training or overzealous cost-cutting."

Gregory Jennings, Jacqueline Reich, Lorenzo Ingram, Sr., Henry Simmons, Calvin Moore, Billy Roberts and Kathy S. Kearns didn't know each other in life, but they shared a common bond in death: All died in U.S. prisons, the victims not of the death penalty, or at the hands of fellow inmates or guards, but in the allegedly negligent care of a single provider of privatized health services.

Correctional Medical Services (CMS) is a St. Louis, Missouri-based for-profit corporation that contracts to provide health care services to over 270,000 inmates at more than 330 prison sites in 29 states. At its website, the company claims to be "the nation's leading provider of contract healthcare services to prisons and jails." It also says it "designs a wide range of correctional healthcare programs and services to meet individual client needs."

CMS offers additional services including "24-hour physician and nursing coverage, specialty physician services, sick call and infirmary care, dental care, chronic care, and laboratory/radiology services." It also performs administrative services as well, including "utilization management, medical affairs management, inmate health education, and infectious disease protocols for AIDS and tuberculosis."

It's difficult to get a sense of the company's current activities from their site since it contains only one press release for 2001 — an announcement of a contract with the Tennessee Department of Corrections to provide health care service to more than 17,000 inmates at 14 state-run facilities. There are two press releases for 2000 and three for 1999.

However, an in-depth investigative report done in 1998 by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, its hometown newspaper, shed light on the downside of prison care privatization. The *Post-Dispatch's* investigative team spent five months "visiting prisons and jails; gathering hundreds of police, court and medical records and other documents; and interviewing doctors, nurses, inmates, lawyers, scholars, prison and health experts and families of inmates who died behind bars."

Published in September 1998, "Death, Neglect and the Bottom Line: Push to Cut Costs Poses Risks" found that while CMS successfully reduced the cost of health care to several states, there were "more than 20 cases in which inmates allegedly died as a result of negligence, indifference, understaffing, inadequate training or overzealous cost-cutting." [For the full report, see: http://www.corpwatch.org/trac/feature/prisons/prisonmedical.pdf].

While the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* report is an excellent starting point for looking into CMS's operations, several recent updates indicate that the company hasn't done much to clean up its act. The American Civil Liberties Union, the Media Awareness Project and the Twin Cities Independent Media Center have all reported on the sorry record of CMS.

At the ACLU web site, the civil liberties organization posts a late-January 2001 letter it sent to the Connecticut Department of Correction (CDOC) that claims CMS's health care services — medical, mental health and dental care — at the Wallens Ridge State Prison in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, is woefully "inadequate." The letter charges the Virginia Department of Corrections with conditions that "violate the Constitution," and maintains that Connecticut prisoners currently at Wallens Ridge are subject to a number of "unconstitutional" situations. (The ACLU was trying to prevent Connecticut from sending any more of its prisoners to Virginia.)

The ACLU writes: "The health care provided by Correctional Medical Services, the contract provider at [Wallens Ridge], was considered so grossly inadequate that [Virginia Department of Corrections] recently fined CMS nearly one million dollars. The Virginia State Auditor specifically found that CMS did not provide a dentist at [Wallens Ridge] for over three months, and never provided an optometrist. Medical privacy and confidentiality is non-existent at [Wallens Ridge]; as a matter of policy, prisoners are required to discuss their most private medical and mental health issues in the presence of security staff and other prisoners."

A June report posted at the Media Awareness Project web site talks about the case of Keith Griggs. At the Woodstock Regional Correctional Facility in Vermont, Griggs was refused methadone treatment for his heroin addiction. At the time he was in the eighth day of a 15-day sentence for failing "to complete an assignment... in a Corrections program for non-violent offenders with substance-abuse problems." CMS, which contracts to provide medical services in the state prisons, cited state rules in refusing Griggs' methadone treatments.

In 1998, the Minnesota Department of Corrections contracted with CMS for health care services in its state's prisons. According to the Twin Cities Independent Media Center, the NAACP called a press conference in mid-October to publicize a lawsuit "over the death of Gregory Jennings, who died in Stillwater prison on April 6, 2001, because the medical staff were indifferent to his complaints of symptoms of diabetes." Reporter Jordan Kushner writes: "It was public knowledge that CMS, in its short history, already had an extensive record of lawsuits and administrative actions against it for failure to provide adequate medical care to prison inmates." Yet, despite this record, the Minnesota Corrections has renewed the contract through at least 2003.

In addition to providing poor health care services, CMS is a union-buster. According to a June 2000 Associated Press story in the *Detroit News*, the United Auto Workers Union, which represents doctors, physician's assistants and nurse practitioners employed by the Michigan Department of Corrections, "sued over Michigan's privatizing health care for prison inmates, claiming prisoner health could suffer if the state expands its contract with the for-profit provider scrutinized in several states."

Privatization has been one of the Right's most enduring ideas during the past several decades. A quick trip to the website of the Heartland Institute, a conservative think tank and information clearinghouse for right-wing policy papers and research studies, came up with more than 260 references to documents about privatization, including papers advocating privatizing education, a bevy of social services including child welfare services and foster care, social security, prisons and more.

The federal government's response to the September 11 suicide attacks has caused some conservatives to voice concern that the era of big government may not be quite over yet. That's what the congressional showdown over the federalizing of safety operations at airports is pretty much all about. House Republican leader Tom DeLay told one of the Sunday morning talk shows that as long as he's in Washington he will do his best to make sure the federal government doesn't expand. Kenneth L. Connor, head of the Family Research Council, a conservative lobbying group said, "It's important that government protect its citizens. But that shouldn't be a pretext for growing government."

Should Calvin Moore, in custody for less than a month at the Kilby Correction Facility in Alabama, have died from being ignored while he lost fifty pounds and exhibited severe symptoms of mental illness, dehydration and starvation? Should Diane Nelson, a 46-year-old mother of three, have died because her request to receive her heart medicine prescribed by her doctor was refused? And what of Charles Guffey, who died of a perforated ulcer because nurses at the Tulsa County Adult Detention Center in Oklahoma refused to pay attention to his complaints of severe abdominal pain?

If these folks were around today they'd have a lot to say about the human cost of the growing privatization of prison health care services. Hopefully, privatization will begin to receive the close scrutiny it deserves. That is the least we can do. The deaths of these men and women, while tragic, should not have been in vain.

Many thanks to Randy Gould's always informative Oread Daily for a heads-up on CMS. To receive the Oread Daily, contact: redpoet@swbell.net

Bill Berkowitz is a freelance writer covering conservative movements and related issues. Contact him at wkbbronx@aol.com.

THE ENFORCERS

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

Law Enforcement
Enforcing injustice
Legalized license to bust us
From a White recognition of Just Us
Concentration camps run as an industry
Idolized and magnified as the means to the end of me
Talk of Freedom from a Master jailer disguised as Right
From the enforcers of unjust Law
Pre-condemned with Death's Face in sight
Ground floor and not the penthouse
Homeless peon better be a mouse
Sneaking through the shadows of life
On scraps from traps — self destruct with Anger's knife
Better Beware — of the Madmen
So what are you enforcing — each one of you
On your all white jury or Black Kangaroo
To your ideological battles of what's right and wrong
While hundreds are dying daily cuz you took too long
With your aid of continued dependence too strong
To break the chains of Division — of man's mutual self-recognition
Beware of the madmen
When you let out the Boys
Who've traded their humanity for your security
To Weed and Seed — Black futurity
To continue to lead a life of poverty
Enforced on you
So what are you enforcing? Each one of you?
Just injustice embodied in the Red, White and Blue
Red is for the blood that weighs in too heavy on your unbalanced scale
White is for the Purity you ill claim from your cemeteries filled with the dead
Underscored by the enforcers' martial wail
Where Caesar's hailed
Call out your Boys
In Blue
Rally around the Rag Boys
Means to repress and imprison you

The Triumph of Business News

by Norman Solomon



"LAISSEZ FAIRE." ***Serigraph by Ben Shahn.*** **The legal system deliberately ignores the ruthless, brutal struggles of big business under unbridled capitalism.**

Countless news stories now amount to little more than human-interest narratives about the glories and tribulations of entrepreneurs, financiers and CEOs. Between 1988 and 1999, the TV networks doubled the amount of air time they devoted to the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq.

After billionaire Michael Bloomberg won the race to become New York's next mayor, the French news agency AFP noted that he "was among the first to see how the information age could serve investors in unprecedented — and lucrative — ways." In recent months, Bloomberg's campaign spent at least $50 million from his vast personal fortune, made possible by a media environment teeming with reverence for accumulation of wealth.

Bloomberg News became a far-reaching wire service during the 1990s as financial news gradually loomed larger in mass media. The operative definition of "general interest news" kept tilting. Mainstream outlets steadily shifted resources and priorities to the business of covering business.

Back in 1970, when PBS launched "Wall Street Week" with Louis Rukeyser, the program was conspicuous. Now it's just one of many national TV shows — most of them daily — focusing on the quest for high returns. After "Moneyline" premiered on CNN in 1980, cable television news grew while embracing the world of investment. In 1989, General Electric opted to dedicate much of its startup news channel CNBC to the stock market.

When host Lou Dobbs left "Moneyline" in spring 1999 at the start of his two-year absence from CNN, it was the cable network's most profitable show. By then, broadcast networks were fervently targeting the same demographics, and not only with explicitly financial offerings like "CBS Marketwatch." Regular news programs got accustomed to lavishing attention on minor business developments — not because of significant economic implications for the general public, but because of executive decisions in news departments.

When CNN revamped its daytime schedule in mid-1999 to make room for three and a half hours of programs about commerce and investment, the cable giant's president Richard Kaplan explained: "We look at business and finance as something we have to cover on a general interest news network. It's like the Cold War in the '50s. You just have to do it."

Some viewers became far more equal than others. For broadcast and cable television, the goal has not simply been to attract a high number of eyeballs. As the Associated Press reported this year in an article about the intense competition between "Moneyline" and CNBC's "Business Center" program: "The audiences are small, but affluent, so advertisers pay a premium to run commercials."

Countless news stories now amount to little more than human-interest narratives about the glories and tribulations of entrepreneurs, financiers and CEOs. At networks owned by conglomerates like GE, Viacom and Disney, the news divisions solemnly report every uptick or downturn of the stock market. Between 1988 and 1999, the TV networks doubled the amount of air time they devoted to the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq.

Viewers may assume that coverage reflects the considered judgment of journalistic pros. But those journalists are in a media industry dominated by corporate institutions with enough financial sway to redefine the functional meaning of professionalism.

National Public Radio airs the "NPR business update" as part of its regular newscast, heard many times each day on stations nationwide. There's no "NPR labor update." Public radio listeners have easy access to the national daily "Marketplace" program and the weekly "Sound Money" show, but there's no "Workplace" or "Sound Labor" broadcast.

In the quarter century since *The New York Times* founded its "Business Day" section, daily papers have turned more and more newsprint over to targeting the affluent readers most coveted by business advertisers. The *Washington Post* expanded its everyday business section from two to 12 pages. Around the country, the pattern has been similar, with a range of media outlets boosting their financial coverage — at the expense of other news.

Along the way, these trends have transformed basic concepts of what it really means to be a journalist. "As the 1980s rocketed along, our 'readers' became 'consumers,'" recalls *New York Times* reporter Diana B. Henriques. "As the 1990s unfolded, those 'consumers' morphed into 'investors.' And today, some of us are speaking only to investors who also own computer modems."

The quality of mainstream journalism has always suffered due to the power of big money in the form of ownership and advertising, but flawed bygone eras are apt to evoke fond nostalgia in the present day. "As our intended audience has gotten narrower, so have we," Henriques lamented a year ago in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. "Business news today rarely sounds the sonorous chords or heart-lifting themes of great journalism. Most of it simply buzzes and squeaks, a reedy clarinet against a rhythm section of cash registers and ticker tape."

That sort of high-rolling muzak provided the backbeat for Michael Bloomberg's march into the elite ranks of billionaires — and into the New York mayor's office.

Norman Solomon's latest book is *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media*. His syndicated column focuses on media and politics.

Poor Leonard's Almanack

Quotations and Original Thoughts
by Leonard Roy Frank
Street Spirit December 2001

On Life

1. Knowledge, love, power — there is the complete life.
HENRI AMIEL (Swiss philosopher, 1821-1881), journal, 7 April 1851, translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, 1887

2. Life is not a having and a getting; / But a being and a becoming.
MATTHEW ARNOLD (English poet, 1822-1888), quoted in Daphne Merkin, "Our Money, Ourselves," *New Yorker*, 26 April 1999

3. The essence of life is a statistical improbability on a colossal scale.
RICHARD DAWKINS (contemporary English biologist), *The Blind Watchmaker*, 1986

4. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better. What if they are a little coarse, and you may get your coat soiled or torn? What if you do fail, and get fairly rolled in the dirt once or twice? Up again, you shall never be so afraid of a tumble.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON (American philosopher, 1803-1882), journal, 11 November 1842

5. Life is mostly froth and bubble, / Two things stand like stone, / Kindness in another's trouble, / Courage in your own.
ADAM LINDSAY GORDON (Azorean-born Australian poet, 1833-1870), "Fytte 8," *Ye Wearie Wayfarer*, 1866

6. The art of life is to know how to enjoy a little and to endure much.
WILLIAM HAZLITT (English writer, 1778-1830), "Common Places," *Literary Examiner*, Sept.-Dec. 1823

7. I wanted to try to live in accord with the promptings which came from my true self. Why is that so difficult?
HERMANN HESSE (German writer, 1877-1962). *Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth*, 1919, translated by Michael Roloff and Michael Lebeck, 1965

8. Life is short, the art long, opportunity fleeting, experience treacherous, judgment difficult.
HIPPOCRATES (Greek physician, 460?-377? B.C.), *Aphorisms*, translated by W. H. S. Jones, 1923

9. Sing love and life and life and love / All that lives is Holy, / The unholiest, most holy all.
BOB KAUFMAN (San Francisco poet, 1925-1986), "Night Sung Sailor's Prayer," *Golden Sardine*, 1967

10. Life is what happens to you / While you're busy / Making other plans.
JOHN LENNON (English musician and songwriter, 1940-1980), "Beautiful Boy" (song), 1981

11. Life's under no obligation to give us what we expect. We take what we get and are thankful it's no worse than it is.
MARGARET MITCHELL (American writer, 1900-1949), *Gone with the Wind*, 1936

12. Life is one day at a time. And thank God! I couldn't take much more.
DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN (contemporary New York senator), appearing on *Meet the Press*, television news program, NBC, 19 June 1994

13. Human life is but a series of footnotes to a vast, obscure unfinished masterpiece.
VLADIMIR NABOKOV (Russian-born American writer, 1899-1977), "Commentary," *Pale Fire*, 1962

14. There is only one happiness in life, to love and be loved.
George Sand (French writer, 1804-1876), letter to Lina Calamatta, 31 March 1862

15. There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval.
GEORGE SANTAYANA (Spanish philosopher, 1863-1952), "War Shrines," *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, 1922

16. Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (Irish playwright, 1856-1950), *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch*, 1921

17. The art of life isn't controlling what happens, which is impossible; it's using what happens.
GLORIA STEINEM (contemporary American writer), "Doing Sixty," *Moving Beyond Words*, 1994

18. Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify, simplify! Simplicity of life and elevation of purpose.
HENRY DAVID THOREAU (American philosopher, 1817-1862), "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," *Walden; or Life in the Woods*, 1854

19. Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen.
MARK TWAIN (American writer, 1835-1910), quoted in W. L. Phelps, *Autobiography with Letters*, 1939

20. We live down here among shadows, shadows among shadows.
JOHN UPDIKE (contemporary American writer), *Buchanan Dying*, 1974

21. If I wanted life to be easy, I should have gotten born in a different universe.
REBECCA WEST (English writer, 1892-1983), "Goodness Doesn't Just Happen," reprinted in Edward P. Morgan, editor, *This I Believe*, 1952

22. It's loving and giving that make life worth living.
SAYING (CANADIAN)

23. Life is like a candle in the wind.
SAYING (CHINESE)

24. Life: big disasters tempered by small ones.

25. Life is a steppingstone to something beyond itself.

26. The trick is to see each day *fresh* — as if it were the first day of your life, and to live it *fully* — as if it were the last.

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Leonard Roy Frank is the editor of *Random House Webster's Quotationary*, a collection of more than 20,000 quotations chosen by amazon.com as one of the 10 best reference works for 1999. Frank's new book, *The Random House Webster's Wit & Humor Quotationary*, contains over 6,000 sayings from 1000 humorists. Both books are available in Bay Area bookstores.

Bush Gets It Bass-ackwards

by Jim Hightower

Jim Hightower's Daily Pops of POPULISM



What were the leading occupational categories of those killed in the horrific terrorist attack on the World Trade Center? Stock brokers and investment bankers, right? That's what you'd think from the media reports, which largely focused on those up-front people who had their names on the company's letterhead. But, in fact, clerks, technicians, and other "back office" workers comprised the big majority of those who perished.

Likewise, of the roughly 25,000 people in New York City who lost their jobs as a direct result of the attack, practically none were Wall Street brokers; while more than half were low-wage service workers in offices, hotels, and restaurants.

What's revealed in these numbers is that, while the media focus is on those at the top of America's economic pyramid, it's the millions of no-name accounting clerks, dishwashers, janitors, cab drivers, mechanics, and others at the base of the pyramid who make our economy work and sustain the few at the top. Yet, you wouldn't know that by the way George W. and the Congress are dealing with the economic shocks from the September 11th attacks, which already have led to the loss of some 700,000 jobs and reduced hours for hundreds of thousands more.

Instead of direct action to shore up this essential base of our economy, Bush & Company have rushed to the top to shower public assistance on those who have not been hurt in the slightest — a capital gains tax break for wealthy speculators, a loophole to encourage Citigroup and other giant banks to move more capital out of the U.S., multibillion-dollar bailouts that protect the gross paychecks of CEOs while specifically denying assistance to tens of thousands of workers fired by those very same CEOs.

Even in a time of national trauma and economic shock, Bush is pushing a corporate credo that says: Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask how much your country can do for you. It's a bassackwards credo, bassackwards economics — and bassackwards patriotism.



"Sidewalk Bubblegum" by Clay Butler

The Assault on Our Freedom

by Jim Hightower

Foreign terrorists are not the only ones assaulting Americans. Try our own Congress. In a furious haste, trying to posture politically and look like they were "doing something" about stopping terrorism, our Washington lawmakers have just rammed a liberty-crushing, privacy-invading, democracy-busting, bureaucracy-fattening mish-mash of new police powers down our throats.

They cynically titled it the "USA Patriot Act," but real patriots like Sam Adams, George Washington, Thomas Paine, Old Ben Franklin, Jimmy Madison, and Tom Jefferson would gag and upchuck at the mere sight of this package of anti-democratic nastiness.

This law gives police sweeping new authority to search our homes and computers, new ways to listen in on our phone conversations and e-mails, and new power to arrest us without any charges. But you might not have heard that obscure provisions in this act shifts the FBI's primary mission from solving crimes to domestic surveillance; it's now to be an internal spy agency. Worse, the *Washington Post* reports that the law also empowers the CIA, for the first time, to snoop on citizens in this country, even allowing the agency to use the secret, nearly unlimited, star-chamber powers of federal grand juries.

What they've created here is a massive spying apparatus of unprecedented scope that essentially is authorized to violate civil liberties wholesale, going far beyond the narrow focus on terrorists who operate here. Forget legal finesse, this thing is a sledgehammer, and it's our Constitution that they're pounding. One of Attorney General John Ashcroft's hit-men for gutting our civil liberties with this law blithely told the *Post* that our freedoms have to give way to police power: "We are going to have to get used to a new way of thinking," he said.

This is Jim Hightower saying, "No thank you." The freedoms that the founders put in place are not trifles to be tossed whenever autocrats find them inconvenient.

War Profiteering

Star-spangled, multibillion-dollar bailouts richly reward CEOs and big investors, but leave hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers out in the cold.

by Jim Hightower

In an editorial cartoon by Pulitzer-Prize winner Ben Sargent, a barrel overflowing with the glop and stench of corporate tax breaks is being decorated by Martha Stewart. She's shown painting it with the red-white-and-blue design of America's flag. As she applies the stars and stripes, she says: "See? There's nothing so ugly or appalling you can't disguise it with this pattern."

So disgustingly true, as Washington has demonstrated again and again since September 11. Already, Bush, the Congress, and a gang of Gucci-clad corporate lobbyists have wrapped the flag around such legislative dreck as "Star Wars" and "Fast Track," declaring it a matter of high patriotism to pass both.

Then there are star-spangled, multibillion-dollar bailouts that richly reward CEOs and big investors, but leave hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers out in the cold. But the most rancid of all, so far, is the sickening "economic stimulus package" that the Republican leadership recently muscled through the House. This is raw garbage, which will stimulate nothing but more campaign contributions from the corporations and speculators who get all the money.

In addition to a special capital-gains tax break that will put 80 percent of the money into the pockets of the wealthiest two percent of Americans, this package includes a retroactive elimination of the "corporate minimum alternative tax." Under this greasy giveaway, $25 billion will be given to a handful of profitable corporations as a full refund of taxes they've paid for the past 15 years!

Among these wartime welfare mooches are Enron, getting $254 million in refunds; GE, getting $671 million; and Ford, getting about $2 billion. This isn't patriotism — it's war profiteering. To stop it, call the Campaign for America's Future: (202) 955-5665.

Gross Corporate Greed

by Jim Hightower

Look out, here comes another Hightower Hog Report. Today's big snorters are the CEOs of major U.S. corporations who keep gorging themselves with ever-fatter pay packages even while they stiff their own employees.

In the so-called Boom of the past decade, average pay for workers barely kept up with inflation and hundreds of thousands of workers were fired; but average CEO pay went up 535 percent, now topping $13 million each! Take Lee Raymond, head of ExxonMobil. In 1999, he punted 16,000 workers, claiming the need to tighten the corporate belt; yet he gobbled up a 50 percent pay raise for himself that year, waddling away with $47 million in pay.

The most hoggish CEOs of the year, though, are America's media moguls, who fought tooth and nail against a pay raise that was being sought by the people who write the scripts for their movies and television shows. The writers were asking for a total pay package of $100 million over three years. No way, shrieked the top honchos of the big studios! One executive even wailed that for studios to pay so much would "simply bankrupt them."

Whoa, hold your thoroughbred horses right there! Let's check the books. Gerald Levin, head of AOL Time Warner, took $153 million in personal pay from his company's trough last year. That's one head of one studio hogging 50 percent more pay in one year than the increase sought by all the writers for all the studios. Levin's not the only hog in the herd, either; for example, Disney Inc. fed nearly $73 million to its CEO (even while he was cutting 4,000 Disney workers and preaching austerity).

As executive-pay expert Graef Crystal put it, how can these guys "deliver a sermon about how everyone has to pull in their belt when they can't even see their own belts because of their enormous pay guts?"

Fake Corporate Patriotism

by Jim Hightower

Corporate America has been running a blizzard of patriotic ads since September 11, wrapping their corporate corpus with our flag, shouting "God Bless America," and declaring "United we stand!" But are they really with us?

Some of today's most ostentatious corporate flag-wavers are the very global giants that just weeks ago were insisting that they owe allegiance to no nation, but instead are "borderless" entities that rise above America's national interests, with loyalty only to their multinational investors. For example, in *The Nation*, investigative journalist Bill Greider tells us that Colgate-Palmolive, which grew to enormous prosperity in our country, now says: "The United States does not have an automatic call on our resources. There is no mindset that puts this country first."

Where do you suggest that Colgate-Palmolive take its mindset?

For the past two decades, the corporations now energetically draping themselves in bunting have been abandoning America's workers and communities, hanging such self-serving, job-destroying, sovereignty-busting albatrosses as NAFTA, WTO, and the new Free Trade Area of the Americas around our necks.

General Motors, GE, Boeing, Motorola, and Dell are among the brand-name, global hot shots who have shucked the red-white-and-blue and moved their capital, jobs, and loyalty offshore. Some, like GE and Boeing, have not only offed America but have demanded that their suppliers also abandon our country.

These corporate empires have moved millions of jobs out of our country; but now, America is hurting. We've lost some 700,000 more jobs since September 11. Our economy is tanking. Now is the time for these giants to put their muscle behind their patriotic rhetoric. Come home, Corporate America! In this time of crisis and hurt, don't just fly the flag, bring jobs back to America... and give us a reason to be proud of you.

Every Mother Is a Working Mother

Every Mother is a Working Mother, a multiracial, national, grassroots network, opposes welfare "reform" because it has, as its basic premise, that caring for our children has no value. As mothers, grandmothers and other caregivers, our network campaigns to establish that raising children and caring work is work; and that the time mothers spend raising their children, and the economic value of their work be included in our right to welfare and other resources.

We campaign for resources to enable a mother to raise her own children full-time or to also work outside the home. Every Mother is a Working Mother (EMWM) is coordinated by the Wages for Housework Campaign, which has worked to put the valuation of caring work on national and international agendas since 1972.

In 1995, with the support of more than 1,200 NGOs worldwide representing millions of people, our coordinating group spearheaded an international effort that won the United Nations decision to measure and value unwaged work in national statistical data and satellite accounts of the Gross Domestic Product. Many have referred to this victory as the most important macroeconomic decision to emerge from the UN Conferences on women; and it would not have happened without the persistence of those of us at the bottom, women who live daily trying to balance our caring work with other responsibilities.

The U.S. Department of Labor has the task of implementing this decision in the U.S., but welfare "reform" ignores the UN decision by not valuing the work of caring. It is time that the U.S. government honors the commitment it made in the United Nations to value caring work; redefining work in welfare policy to include caregiving must be part of that effort.

The reality of economically rewarding those who do caring work already has some precedents. In Los Angeles County, relatives can be paid by the County for caring for elderly or disabled low-income family members. Both Montana and Minnesota have programs where mothers are paid the money that states have set aside to pay for childcare for caring for their infants full time.

The Clinton administration made a proposal picked up by six states (California not included) that parents have the option of drawing unemployment benefits while staying home to care for small children. In most industrialized countries, including Canada, all mothers in their own right and



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

name receive a family allowance or child benefit that is not means-tested in recognition that mothers need economic support. Low-income mothers receive welfare in addition to child benefits or family allowances. The United States is way behind much of the world.

EMWM is well aware that not all mothers want to care for their children full-time. Those who work outside the home must have pay equity, quality childcare, education and training of our choice, and protection from discrimination. It has been found that welfare "reform" is responsible in part for making the pay gap between women and men even wider. Mothers on welfare have every right to work outside the home; but it must be a choice — not a mandate, not forced work.

Those of us who value caring work are undermined both by government policy and by advocates who implement that policy. With a few notable exceptions, the advocacy network agrees with the government's "jobs only" agenda, instead of pressing for women to have a choice to care for their own children.

We want legislators and advocates alike to know this cannot stand. Caregivers are the heart of the economy, yet we are ignored and discriminated against in welfare and other policy. We are not beggars at anyone's gate. Welfare is a right, an entitlement based on the caring work we do. *The Wall Street Journal* has reported that the value of the work of a mother is $500,000 a year; in comparison, what we get in welfare is a drop in the bucket. Internationally the UN estimated the value of women's unwaged work at $11 trillion.

We do not accept that in order for us to have any value we must be at the mercy of a brutal global market, stuck in low-waged work. Welfare "reform" is an attack on all of us, whether or not we are on welfare. It is forced work and low-waged work recruitment, forcing mothers into a killing workday.

Mothers of young children are reporting having less than 30 minutes a day of waking time with our babies. We are denied the right to breastfeed. Recent studies have shown that welfare "reform" has had a negative impact on teenage children. Adolescents suffer when we are forced to meet the welfare "reform" requirements; their grades drop and behavioral problems increase. We are separated from our children, who are left in the care of strangers, hungry, with no or little time with us and usually with no medical benefits. This will get worse when the time runs out on the 60-month time clock for receiving benefits, and we will be left destitute with no safety net.

The US PROStitutes Collective, part of our network, is acutely aware of more women and children living in poverty, and more and more of us ending up homeless, dead, in prostitution or otherwise "criminalized," trying to feed our kids. Cuts in welfare increases the numbers of mothers on welfare picked up for prostitution. Welfare "reform" puts our lives and the lives of our children in jeopardy; we are pushed to the limits financially, physically, and emotionally.

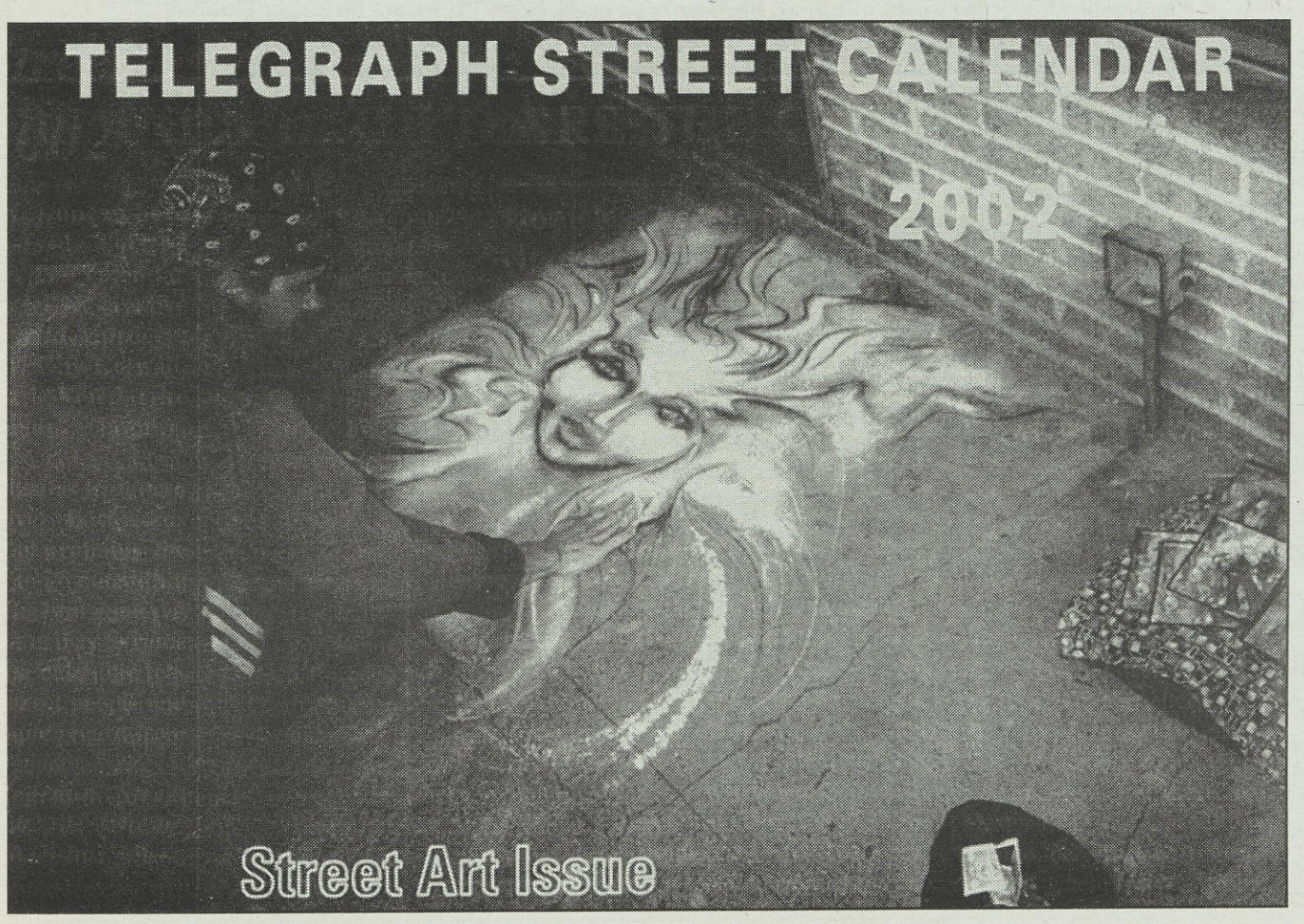
Welfare "reform" is a racist attack. The majority of those receiving benefits are Black and Latina. Many Latino and Black youths are left with no real choices but prison or the army, resulting in 60 percent of the U.S. armed forces now being people of color, lives that are considered expendable. We are refusing this plan for our children and the youth in our communities.

Welfare "reform" denies the work done by women with disabilities and older women in caring for themselves and others. It forces lesbian and other mothers to name the father of their children and sue for child support. It puts women at risk of violent relationships. It discourages breastfeeding. It has also widened the pay gap even further between women's and men's wages. It cuts benefits to immigrant women. On top of an already overburdened workday, we also face the additional stress of fighting with welfare case workers and having to demand state hearings to get even the little we're entitled to.

What's at stake here is where society is headed. Do we demand the resources to which we are entitled to do the crucial work of caring? Or do we allow killing to be prioritized over caring? Instead of money going to women and children, money that is rightfully ours, we see our money poured into military spending and weapons for the bombing of Afghanistan and other military actions around the world, threatening even more lives; and into corporate welfare, a "safety net" for corporations that adds up to a multibillion-dollar handout.

We are calling for the value of caring work to be reflected in welfare benefits; an end to time limits and other punitive measures and discrimination; an end to forced work. We also demand education and training of our choice; and declare that the right to benefits must not depend on immigration status. Mothers must have the choice to raise our own children!

Caregivers are the heart of the economy but, along with our children, always come last. Killing is prioritized over caring, the non-carers over the carers. We say Welfare, Not Warfare! Stop the War! Invest in Caring, not Killing!



Telegraph Street Calendar 2002

Ace Backwords and B.N. Duncan have published a "Street Art Issue" of the *Telegraph Street Calendar*. The calendar showcases the work of such wildly creative Berkeley street artists as David Murdock, Ray Winters, Richard List, Guy Colwell, Moby Theobald, Ortiz, Friederike Rheinheimer, Cliff Mason, Jaguar, Backwords and Duncan.

This 13th edition of the calendar features a full-color front and back cover. Backwords and Duncan declare, "This is probably the last issue, and we are happy to go out with a bang with what we consider the best issue yet, featuring some of the greatest artists to come out of the street scene.... The calendar features art by, for and about street people and the street scene. This is a unique record from inside the scene."

To purchase the Telegraph Street Calendar, call (510) 486-8302, or write to: Telegraph Street Calendar, P.O. Box 12642, Berkeley CA 94712.

Playing The Lottery

by Julia Vinograd

I'm playing the lottery.
When I win I'll be so rich
that "war" will be another short, obscure word
still in the dictionary but mainly useful
for morning crossword puzzles, like Gaul or Ming.
I'll be so rich
that panels of experts on tv will cut
The New York Times into strings of paper dolls
because nothing happened today.
I'll be so rich
I'll buy hangovers from street drunks
collage them into a modern symphony
and everyone will go once a month
in their best clothes
because they've gotten bored with feeling good.
I'll be so rich
I'll donate science fiction holidececks to hospitals,
detailed as on the Starship Enterprise,
so patients can program them with memories:
going dancing, a summer at the beach,
birthdays when they were children.
So they can wear real clothes again
and only be touched by lovers.
I'll be so rich
I'll make grade schools teach a special course called:
"No, you won't understand when you grow up."
I'll be so rich
I'll give a hundred comfortable rocking chairs
to every welfare office so no single mother
ever has to stand in line again.
I'll be so rich
I'll hire the circus to deprogram armies
and turn them back into boys,
faces sticky only with cotton candy,
screaming only on roller coasters,
shooting only at wooden ducks in carny booths
to win their girl a huge teddy bear
with an awkward red ribbon.
The ringmaster can do anything,
that's why he wears a top hat.
I'll leave the details up to him.
I'm playing the lottery.
When I win I'll be so rich
everything will be all right
the way they always promised me
when I was a child
and scared of the dark.

Beyond The Desolation

by Husayn Sayfuddiyn

Beyond the skyscrapers, asphalt and concrete
I saw the natural earth aglow with life
Through the desolation,
I saw The Garden
Everywhere
Beyond the desolate parking lots and through
The smoggy skies where under we kill and then
In afterthought, cry
For the Garden
Not knowing the Garden — is everywhere
Can't you see it?
All around you
And in you
The towering trees and snow capped mountains
prairies stretched like the expanding Universe
and yet, not an atom's width of its breadth
Its fruits are within easy reach and yet,
not sharing is what we teach
Hoarding—to deprive one another of shelter and life
Reducing it to debits and credits —
desolation's common law wife
Called Commerce
Bought and sold on a rigged auction block
Commercializing their humanity for
A golden watch to clock
Or being clowned for a hit from a $20 rock
All the while you beguile yourself into believing
You're getting a piece of the Rock
That you're climbing while you're standing
In the Garden
Can't you see it? The Garden? Beyond the desolation
Staring at you, in the mirror?
And everywhere
And in everyone?
The only problem is,
You need to close your eyes
They have you hypnotized..



Art by Doug Minkler

Where Is America's Innocence?

by Cinnamon Marshall, *age 15*

The home of the free and the land of the brave
Has become the home of the cold-hearted killer, and
The land of dying hopes. A place where so many
Give up everything and receive nothing but pain and
Hardships in the end.

The land of depleted dreams and broken hearts.
The phrase "trust no one" is no longer just a phrase.
It has evolved into a silent law. It saddens me that in this
Day and time people aren't acting like people. No,
Instead they act like animals trying desperately to survive.

Innocence, it exists for awhile in small children, babies,
But not for long. Children are beaten, abused, and
Even killed. Those mistreated children who survive grow
A hatred inside. Something that takes control of that
Innocence and pushes it away.

The thing is, America was never innocent. Corruption
Was, is, and always has been a part of the "American Way."
War is not innocent; therefore, life is not innocent.
War and life are essentially the same thing.
Kill or be killed. You survive or you die. Sink
Or swim. It is a part of daily life.

Can we rekindle innocence? I don't know.
How do you rekindle a never-present flame?
You're born with hopes and dreams. Yet, somehow,
This world destroys those dreams and lets those hopes
Fly away. Innocence exists but only for a short while.
Then, it slips through the fingers of life's shelter, like a
Flame caught in the wind.

Still, people hope. Still, people dream, and out of
The ashes of a tragic catastrophe, good will rise.
The compassion of the world will show. Because in all good,
There is bad; but despite all bad, there is, ultimately, good.

Supper In Hell

by Chris Trian

When do the toads realize they're boiling?
When does love fail and the drugs stop working?
When do we wake up,
and when does the revolution of reason begin?
When do we lose enough to be fearless?
When does suspicion take the place of faith?
When does the big guy come down
and play on our side for a change?
When do we realize
that they don't give a rat's ass for our asses?
That history is a set up.
That the "theater of war" is really theater.
That good and evil, life and death, freedom and slavery,
and all those proud aphorisms,
are just squares on a board game,
and that the game is always up
on the common man and woman.
They have our bodies. They have our souls.
And we don't even know who they ARE yet… do we?
When do the toads realize they're boiling?
And when is supper served in hell?

If I Was Only Human

by Chris Trian

If I was only human
I would light a candle
and curse the light.
I would go out and buy an American flag,
a dozen American flags.
If I was only human,
I'd give up my civil liberties on the spot.
Who needs them; this is WAR.
If I was only human
I'd back my president 100 percent
WHOEVER he might be.
If I was only human
I would hate my enemy
with all my heart and soul.
I'd go out in the street
and ask the first person I met:
are you WITH us?
And I'd know what to do
if I got the wrong answer.
Because I'd be SURE of myself,
no wimp factor for me.
I'd KNOW who my enemy was.
Moslem, Christian, American, Jew.
The Military Industrial Complex.
History, time, space, emptiness, loneliness.
Can you imagine a world-wide crusade
against loneliness?
If I was only human
I would wage a holy war against reason
for betraying us all.
Those crazy news broadcasts.
All those people running in the street
like a bad Fifties Sci-fi movie.
The Taliban giant squid
that ate Manhattan
with ice cream and a cherry on top.
If I was only human
I wouldn't laugh or sing or dance
any more, but work night and day
for the destruction of anything
and the restoration of something.

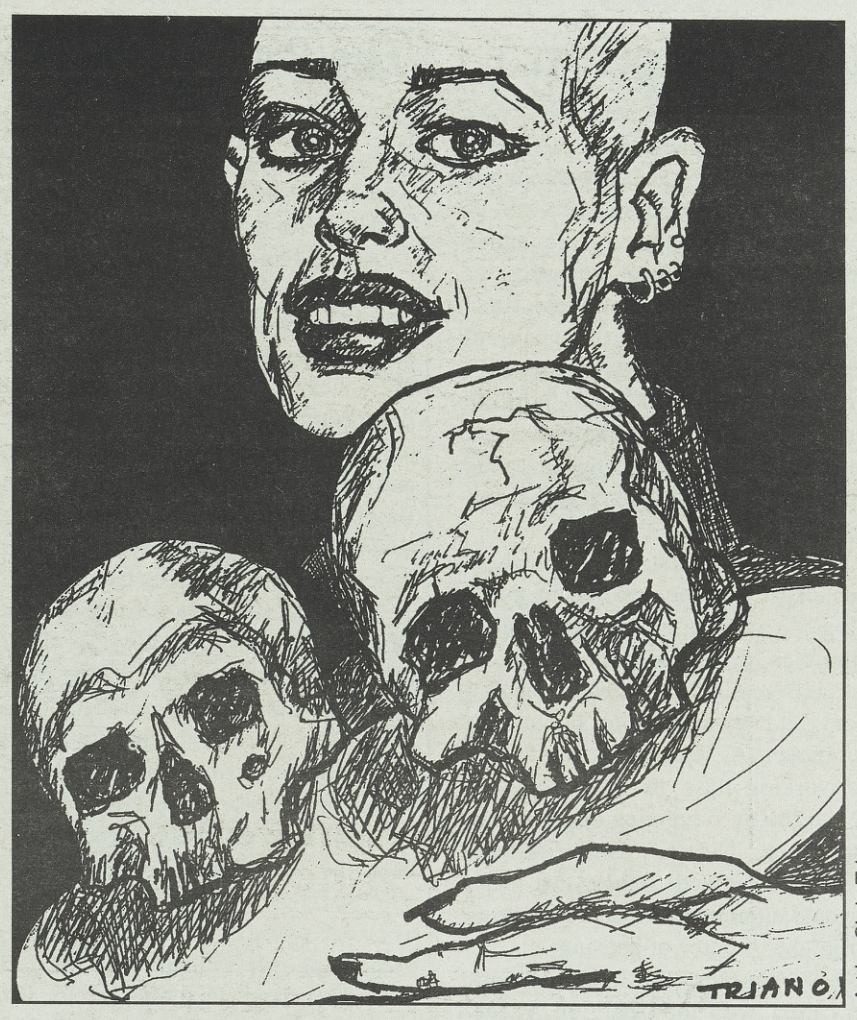
But I was spared
from the wrath of the enemy.
My children were spared,
my lover, my home.
It was my day off
and my dinner wasn't even interrupted.
But SOMETHING sure was interrupted.
And now we're told by reporters
that our American lives
will never be the same.
They're burying freedom
as the smoke still rises.
We're told we've lost our virginity
and joined the ranks
of the internationally wanton.
Broken but still kicking
we are welcomed
by the world community of cripples,
orphaned from the motherland
of righteousness.
If we are no longer innocent
then certainly we must be guilty.
If I was only human
I would NEVER think
my country was guilty.

But I was not destroyed,
nor even compromised.
Therefore, I am not human any more.
Nor are my children, nor my lover,
nor a large part of our friends.
Exiled from tragedy,
we watch astonished
the torch light parade
for retribution,
pitch forks and bayonets
pointed at the moon.
And wouldn't it be fine
if we could kill the moon,
if we were only human.
If we were only HUMAN.
But we lost our chance
in a quick apocalypse of sanity.
And the chance can't be replayed on CNN.
Though we watch that plane
go easily, like a mad ghost,
right into that building
a million times
in our dreams.

PROGRESS

by Julia Vinograd

Every cell of my body has its own cell phone;
let your fingers do the walking.
Even the silence we sit in
is mass produced by children
in third world countries,
and before it was boxed and sent overseas
they put it in their hungry mouths,
can you taste their little tongues
when we kiss?
The sparechanger outside this club
last Sunday had a cardboard sign:
"www.I am broke.com". People gave money.
Can the internet be a safety net
when falling is a job description?
Or can a made up computer language
make us real to each other?
3 homeless guys watched the presidential
debate in the parking lot under my window
on a small black and white tv.
The tv didn't work very well
but neither did the debate.
And the guys looked like it had been raining
inside them for some time.
Where can we send a welcome mat
to get it fixed?
Who lives in homefree,
"alle, alle outsen homefree?"
Schools. Guns. Not even children now.
This is a country we live in
with proud, beautiful songs.
Where can we send a song
to get it fixed?



Art by Chris Trian

Hopeless

by Loyd Skiles

Saxaphone in a barroom
Buddha's band
Goin' kill the spirit and you don't
have to kill the man

Here comes the bride, everybody
dressed in white
Their queen got captured, so
they sacrificed the night

Treason was in season,
but it stalled,
Like the drummer who's better
than no drummer at all

Met the President — he's a
double-cross
Now it's one to nothing,
New York City lost

Mom's a geek & dad's a Kelly Girl
On TV I play the part of Merle
Chaos reigns & silver sirens wail & the
government will ensure that you fail

Fly your big black chopper over
both my feets
Ain't my problem that they
split the sheets

The music of the goddess
when she sings
Falls to earth like feathers
from her wings

911

by Nancy Warder

again and again in my dreams
the Twin Towers fall
the planes crashing into the buildings
forever

waking, I wonder
were we asleep all the long years
safe behind our shining seas
while thousands died
in Panama, in Chile, in Irag,
in Indonesia, in Guatemala,
in Nicaragua
all over the world
each life as precious
as our own beloved dead

blinded by rage, we strike out wildly
false leaders drive us
towards Armageddon
each side a mirror of the other

in the name of God
in the name of Allah
Stop!

The Living And The Dead

by Chris Trian

The world ended last September
and we feel almost fine.
In Manhattan they've finished
digging the living and the dead
out of the rubble.
In Washington the living and the dead
are making plans to bury Democracy.
In offices across the land
the living and the dead
open letters wearing latex gloves.
Condoms are worn on everyone's soul
as a spiritual anthrax
gently embraces
the living and the dead.
The world ended last September
and we feel almost fine.
In the streets, on buses, in banks,
in bed between troubled sheets,
we size each other up.
You can't tell the difference
between the living and the dead.
You'd have to get to know a person
and there just isn't time.
The drums of war beat everywhere.
In Pentagons and pentagrams.
In post offices and salad spinners.
Death hides at the bottom
of a glass of water,
in between praying hands,
in a trembling candle flame
at a streetside altar.
Every day the enemy gets closer.
We don't know
WHO'S more dangerous:
The living dead
or the dead living.
All we know
is normalcy is hanging by a noose.
It's Nineteen Thirty Three again.
The world ended last September
and we feel almost fine.

IN WAR

by Julia Vinograd

Death has put on her dancing shoes;
"your last breath is your first kiss,
there's nothing better than this.
Darling, only the living lose."

Death has put on a blood red dress
and let down her shining hair.
She murmurs while machine guns blare
"darling, I've been waiting, yes."

Death is afraid of being alone;
she won't be a wallflower in the war.
She wants a partner and she wants more,
"darling, take me home."

What If America Knew

by Teddy Bakersfield

what if america knew
about middle east history
and how osama bin laden

came to be

about the sanctions against the iraqi people
which kill their children
so indiscriminately

then the obscene claim
that killing the innocents
is worth the price

of the shame

what if america knew
its government's support
of israel

helps oppress the palestinian people

and its acceptance
of saudi rulers
who murder their own citizens

is unjustifiable

what if america knew
the ties between america's corporate rule
and media lies

dumb down the people

so they don't hear the cries

for what if america knew
a foreign policy proclaimed in its name
contributed to this atrocity

and its magnificent heroes
who suffered and died
at ground zero this day

were betrayed by what its rulers do and say

what if america knew
it did not have to happen this way

what, then, would americans do?

Calling All Monsters

by Julia Vinograd

Calling all monsters,
calling all monsters:
we're afraid, come feed off our fear
until it's gone.
Death comes in the mail, death flies on planes,
how can we protect ourselves
without paralyzing ourselves?
Monsters under the bed
will you move over
and let us hide under the bed with you?
We'll moan and tremble while you eat us,
tentacles holding us lover-close
and we'll give our fear back to you where it belongs
and we'll be safe cause you're not real.
Calling all monsters,
calling all monsters:
lines of white powder on a mirror in a nightclub
are lines of white powder,
what are they really, anthrax, smallpox?
Who's behind the mirror, plotting?
Vampires with no reflection who call us cattle
come in your capes, cast your glamour.
While our hearts are in our throats
sink your fangs and drink.
Then break the mirror and milk our fear
the way you'd milk cows in the morning
mooing plaintively with swollen udders.
As you drink our blood thrust your cold hands
under our clothes. Our pleasure is yours,
knees collapsing we are yours
and we don't need to be afraid of anyone else.
Calling all monsters,
calling all monsters:
King Kong, where were you when those planes
came for the World Trade towers?
We trusted you to grab them out of the air
and crush them in your hairy fists.
Were you taking a South Sea island vacation,
tickled by half-naked dancing girls,
drowsing under mango trees?
Do you think the victims' families will ever watch
your movies again? You're a joke.
Tear up the Afghan caves, flush out the terrorists
like rabbits, step on all the people we're scared of
and maybe we'll be scared of you again.
But we look at the ruins and they're real.
Terribly real.
Calling all monsters,
calling all monsters:
We can't control our fear.
We're like suddenly incontinent old people
stinking up hospital beds,
the stained sheets need changing once an hour
by nurses who make disgusted faces
Maybe we're chained to invisible hospital beds that
we wear to work, to school, shopping for the holidays.
Only you, our monsters will come when we call,
will change our sheets,
will polish our chains till they shine,
will take our fear.
And the faces you make are the faces we wear
to pretend to be scared when we're safe.
Come for us, soon.

National Day of Housing Action

from page two

from overnight prayer vigils, pickets of landlords, college campus sleep-outs and pickets of congressional representatives. Other cities participating included: Sacramento, CA; Denver, CO; Wichita, KS; College Park, MD; Mississippi; Newark, NJ; New York, NY; Guilford, NC; Portland, OR; Harrisburg, PA; Philadelphia, PA; Sioux Falls, SD; Memphis, TN; and Dallas, TX.

Fighting back during the Great Depression, 1930-1936

If the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund passes Congress, it will be a significant shift in federal housing policy. The construction of over 1.5 million new homes will mean meaningful employment and truly affordable housing, so affordable in fact that we might see the first dent in homelessness in over two decades. However, it is important to remember that much of the "housing social safety net" was the result of collective and direct actions by unemployed workers during the Great Depression of 1930-1936.

November 14, 2001, will be remembered as a day when homeless people, workers, students and members of the faith community came together to build a national housing movement. As we strategize in the coming weeks about what that movement will look like, it will certainly be helpful to look back at the not-very-distant-past for some direction.

At first, Unemployed Councils sprang up in many industrial cities as a response to the massive lay-offs as a result of the stock market crash. That time is not unlike the one we live in now. It was preceded by a time when many Americans had an almost religious belief in the economy and future prosperity (compare to the 'New Economy' hype.) As in our era, the national climate in the 1930s was marked by wars and rumors of war, as the Allies and the Axis players lined up on the WWII chessboard.

The Unemployed Councils were neighborhood-based and concerned themselves with fighting for the very basic survival of community members grappling with poverty, some for the first time. When a neighbor was denied relief by government officials, organizers, often members of the Communist Party, would return to the relief offices with greater numbers, shutting down business until demands were met.

During this time, just less than 30 years before the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, the Unemployed Councils directly opposed racism and exposed how economic racism most directly affected Blacks, even in the liberal North. The councils rallied against discrimination in the rehiring of unemployed workers, not only because of race, but gender and religion as well.

Certainly the most dramatic tactic, and the most successful as well, was the anti-eviction struggle led by the Unemployed Councils. This movement was strongest in New York and Detroit. Using a "Block Committee" governance structure, the councils effectively were able to mobilize against evictions. In this structure the committees were organized on a small scale (one or two blocks), which delegated to a Neighborhood Council and finally to a Citywide Unemployed Council.

The "un-eviction" tactic was simple and succinct, requiring no major legislation to enforce it. Neighbors, numbering sometimes in the thousands, would physically intervene in evictions, or move the evicted back into their homes. In New York, at least 70,000 evictions were obliterated in this way. In Detroit, a five-year eviction moratorium was declared.

The Unemployed Councils reached a national fervor, with mass demonstrations in almost every North American city. Some cities were incredibly sedate, such as San Francisco, where the Unemployed rally was attended by City Council members and the chief of police. In other areas more militant struggles collided with local authorities.

Still, the scope of the movement, which began to make links with organized employed labor in the CIO, presented a threat to the established order. With the presence of radicals within the movement, and anxieties amongst the ruling class about revolutionary change, it was clear that concessions had to be made.

A key demand, first brought forward by Socialists, was the creation of public housing. As originally intended, public housing was to be held permanently off the speculative market, owned by the government, and immune to the fluctuations of the market. As intended, it was for the entire working-class, the most impoverished and the ones bringing home a regular paycheck. The real estate industry went ballistic, correctly fearing that such a plan would eliminate their ability to profiteer from the resource of housing.

In Los Angeles, the landlord front group called itself the Coalition Against Socialist Housing, or CASH. It was thanks to people like this that public housing became specialized only for the very poor — the people that the profiteering landlords had no interest in renting to.

It is ironic, then, that the current housing programs which promise to "integrate" the poor through "mixed-income" developments usually end up punishing those in need. During the Bush-Clinton-Bush years, the demolition of public housing has dispersed poor people to suburbs, often far from workplaces. Income-mixing requirements mean that most very poor people can't even access federally subsidized housing anymore.

As defined by the federal government today, "affordable housing" is generally designated for those who make over 30 percent of an area's median income. By no means are such workers anywhere near being rich or even, arguably, middle-class. However, they are being pitted against those with the very "worst-case" housing needs for the same scarce housing.

Some of the Unemployed Councils' other key demands during the Depression era became incorporated into the New Deal and subsequent wartime economic interventions. Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed off on wartime rent controls, which remain in effect in New York City to this day.

The people have the power

One of the most valuable lessons from the Unemployed Councils is that direct action, outside of the electoral system, can make a real difference in people's lives, and serve as a building block for a larger movement. This is not to say that progressive forces should just give the electoral arena over to the right wing; simply that the most powerful source of change comes from the people themselves, irregardless of who is in power at the moment. The Communist Party USA, which played such a pivotal role in organizing the Unemployed Councils, later became irrelevant as they started to respond more to centralized leadership bodies (i.e., the Kremlin) and less to the needs of the people of Harlem. This was in direct contradiction to an earlier ideological, yet less rigid model of responsiveness to the neighborhoods they operated in.

When social change platforms are drafted in dialogue with the base communities, they have legitimacy and life. When they are written by elite central committees, no matter how well intentioned, they are lifeless and dogmatic and quickly lose the attention and respect of the majority of people.

The destruction and renovation of public housing under the HOPE VI program has been a major lost opportunity. A progressive program would have increased the number of below-market units nationwide, instead of reducing them. Federal investment could have meant revitalization from below — but instead has meant displacement on most levels.

"One Strike and You're Out!" laws apply zero-tolerance drug laws in a way that has resulted in grandparents being evicted for the alleged crimes of their grandchildren. Immigrant exclusion acts have returned to federal policy. Those living in unsubsidized housing (the vast majority of workers) are subject to the whims of the market and often find themselves at the short end of the stick in boom-times and bust.

The time is ripe for a new national housing movement. But how can we build it? Here are suggestions to stimulate debate.

Direct action gets the goods

The nationwide housing movement needs to evolve methods of direct action that make a place for those who have a lot to lose from arrest and police scrutiny. A truly powerful movement will use direct action, but will not leave out single mothers, immigrants and youth. The vast new powers that will be granted to law enforcement post-September 11th will undoubtedly change the game of civil disobedience and direct action in the United States. Still, it is unlikely that power will concede a damn thing without a fierce, disruptive fight.

Take race seriously

In San Francisco alone, 48 percent of the shelter population is African American, while the overall population of African Americans has dwindled to about seven percent, thanks to gentrification and urban removal programs. While the housing/homelessness crisis is essentially an issue of class, it is foolish to become "color-blind" to the reality that the crisis hits communities of color the hardest.

Organize locally

The local level is where most people organize, where there is the most opportunity for effective direct actions and movement building. If on a federal level, massive new funding for truly affordable housing was created, communities would still have to contend with zoning battles and toxic racism in order to build anything.

Link up nationally

I once had the honor of working alongside tenants at North Beach Public Housing around a "Revitalization From Below" campaign. While we worked together to win many impressive changes, I wish that we had worked harder to make links with other tenants facing the same battles in other cites. As organizers we were so concerned with our accountability to the tenants we worked with that we shied away from some natural alliances. I think now that we could have made common cause without diluting the local one. When Randy Shaw of Housing America first published *Reclaiming America*, advocating national organizing, a lot of activists dismissed it. However, as time goes by the essential wisdom of taking the struggle national becomes more and more obvious.

Don't forget the global picture

The cuts in housing and other social programs go right along with the over-all trend of globalization. Local activists need to remember that the anti-globalization movement has a lot of energy and wisdom to offer. Global economy activists seem to be starting to understand that the struggle for global solidarity starts on the local level. When social spending is cut in Brazil or Argentina, the issue is framed as an austerity measure and debated as a part of the global economy by both mainstream and left presses. When housing subsidies are cut in the United Sates, it is off the screen of most progressive media outlets and organizations. It is this kind of blindsiding that leaves the larger social movements marginalized, middle-class, and white-dominated.

Also, we should be honest about how the costs of the war on terrorism and Bush's tax cuts for the rich are directly impacting spending on programs that could benefit working and unemployed people. It may seem unpopular to appear unpatriotic, but understanding the clear trade-off in these political decisions is too important to ignore.

As the workplace becomes smaller and more atomized, the city has in some respects replaced the giant factory of old as the best place to fight strategic struggles for economic justice. Along with the fight for real living wages, the housing struggle is one of boundless opportunities for movement building.

The Right to a Roof

from page two

the last 20 years. Someone in the crowd yelled, "We need a *new* New Deal!" and cheering erupted.

At the Page Hotel, our next stop, a SRO hotel resident spoke in Cantonese about how SROs are often the only available housing to the most vulnerable people — especially families and recent immigrants. Tenants at this SRO have organized against the management's racist and illegal eviction procedures. Miguel Barrera of Hogares Sin Barreras then made the point, "We all should be able to demand housing no matter our culture!"

Next was the former Empress Hotel, an SRO that was shut down by the city for health reasons in 1981. The owners of the building recently invested millions in the hotel in order to illegally reopen it as the now tourist-only West Cork Hotel. Meanwhile these same landlords have left their other SRO hotels (most notoriously the Alder Hotel on 6th St.) in disrepair. An SRO resident spoke about the need of owners and government to respect people's needs and the laws, reminding them: Don't forget about the people who were here before you.

By the time we made it to the *Examiner* building to protest that newspaper's smear campaigns against the poor and homeless of the city, we were informed that local housing activists were already occupying a nearby vacant building and needed our support. In a phone interview from inside the infamous "defenestration" building at 6th and Howard, Ted Gullicksen of the San Francisco Tenant's Union explained why the activists had chosen to occupy this building. "Notorious landlord David Patel evicted the building's tenants about 12 years ago, and now is asking the city to pay an inflated $2 million to buy it. While this building's 75 apartments would be an important first step towards addressing the need for low-income housing in the city, real estate speculation and government inaction have left it vacant"

Alison Lum of Homes Not Jails, also occupying the building, said that the group planned not only to house over 100 people at this location but also to employ them in fixing up their future homes. Local activists are determined to not just campaign for the government to recognize the housing needs of our communities, but to take an immediate stand against the city's unwillingness to create low-income housing. As Lum stated, "We will not let people suffer while buildings stand vacant!"

The following day after police arrested the protesters and forcibly removed them, only the voices of resistance remained, whistling through the now-empty building, "Aqui Estamos Y no Nos Vamos, Everyone has a Right to a Roof."

Caroline Jack Rescues Cats

from page one

office where pit bull trainers get boxes of free abandoned kittens to train blood lust into their dogs, or from other street folk who may be abusing them. She takes them in from people like the two little boys who just didn't know how to handle their kitten, or from people who think they won't survive anyway, so "give them to the homeless woman. Give them to *that*."

She had a three-week-old tiny tiger hiding in the warm folds of her blanketed lap. She bragged of her little kitten's accomplishment: "She's my little girl. She can climb up this towel."

Caroline has her cats harnessed and holds on tight while they leap and play around her. She asked me to help her unwind the tiger's leather leash from the steel posts holding the big wheels onto her chair. Unable to turn to see where the little orange bundle of nitroglycerin has jumped this time, she tries to drag him away from the curb to safety with a quick forward tug.

This is a smart and savvy woman who is an articulate and witty conversationalist. She talks to tourists who come by, and she learns from them. She is up on everything. She told me, before I later read about it on Salon.com, how the hotel industry in San Francisco is suffering now that tourism is down. Hardest hit are the maids, doorpersons, and clerks. She said a friend employed in a big hotel across the street only works two days a week even though he is unionized. "For the past three months, his life has been a living hell."

She and I talked to a man from Switzerland, a tourist, who showed us photos of his three cats, one a tiger, and two "rag dolls," a fairly rare and beautiful breed with fluffy white hair around big adorable wide-set eyes who he found on the Internet. He said, "These cats are everything to me." He told us how his big tiger cat went away to the lady across the hall when he brought these rag dolls in. The tiger needed time to get used to them, so he visited on and off for about six months. Then he accepted them and came home.

Caroline exclaimed, "You are a person who obviously loves your cats. You allowed the tiger time to adjust. That's exactly the way I train people to introduce a new cat into an existing group. I tell them put the old cat in a room, and let the new cat have the run of the house for a couple of weeks so he can get the smell of the existing cat, and understand the first cat is there. Don't put them in the place together and let them duke it out. It only creates cats who hiss and snarl and hate each other. And don't treat one more special than the other, because they get jealous like children do. Treat them exactly the same. Then they start to act like a family."

"My method doesn't always work, though," she added. "Sometimes a cat just can't get along with other cats. Usually that cat has been abused and mistreated."

The Swiss gentleman had passed Caroline Jack's test. She said she wouldn't give her cats to "just anyone." The person must come back several times, she explained, so "I know the cat is going to a good home with a person who won't abuse the animal."

Caroline is also very angry about what she sees happening to her and the other people on the street. The police take their belongings, which is all they have, from shopping carts without the 24-hour notice that the Coalition on Homelessness is demanding. Caroline said everyone knew it hadn't passed immediately after the action was voted down by the S.F. Board of Supervisors. "I found out on the grapevine because people out here do talk."

Caroline said, "Three months ago, they took our stuff. The owner of the store we sleep in front of never complained. It was a new cop that didn't know us. They took the cart and everything in the cart, except they left us some blankets and pillows because they knew it was very cold at night."

Caroline thinks these sweeps by the Department of Public Works (DPW) can be a cover for theft. When the police were called about her lost belongings, they blamed it on the DPW. Then the DPW "criss-crossed stories," and blamed it on the SFPD. She said all her belongings were new, clean, and folded neatly in her cart, "and they just took them." She had a "cat carrier, cat box, clean socks, clean shirts, clean everything in there."

They took expensive pads she needs for her bladder problem, made worse by sitting from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., often without moving. They also took her heart medicine. She said, "I saw the truck. It was loaded down with everything all thrown together in a heap, as if it really was garbage, which it was NOT."

In this depressed economy, she says, she makes $16 to $20 in a 10-12 hour day. "I am out here late." That averages $1.50 to $2.00 an hour sitting in noisy traffic, drowned out by the whistles of the hotel doormen calling cabs, the clanging of the trolleys, car horns honking, people shouting and jabbering constantly, and finally, at 9:00 p.m., the cacophonous saxophone from a panhandler's sloppy rendition of "Take The A-train," and "These Are A Few Of My Favorite Things." (I wanted to ask him to stop so we could finish our interview, but Caroline told me, "He will just give me trouble, so please don't do it. He has to make his buck.")

Later, I was shopping at an upscale neighborhood market, Molly Stone, a grocery store appealing to the well-heeled in mansions and expensive high-rise condos near my small Victorian. A man stood outside the store on California Street giving away leaflets for "USA for UNHCR," an organization whose info letter he downloaded from the Internet. The letter requests a donation of $50 for refugees in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. It calls itself the "United States Association for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees." Claims to have Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, President Emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, on its board.

I asked him if he knew about the 300 Afghan refugees who drowned off the coast of Australia or about the women and children near the Pakistan border in danger from murderous road bandits. He said he didn't. I said I was writing about the homeless in San Francisco, who I thought had a similar plight to these refugees. They fight a war every day just to survive. He said he did not think so, because it was easy to live in San Francisco off the refuse the rich leave in their garbage cans, and the refugees did not have that luxury.

"How do you know?" I asked.

He said, "I used to be homeless. The homeless get welfare checks, and instead of spending the money on an apartment, they buy drugs. They are all junkies, you know."

I said, "The $320 a month they get could not cover the rent in an apartment in San Francisco. I know many personally, and most are intelligent people — some are musicians, writers, poets, runaways from abusive families, failed dot-commers. A lot of them have jobs. Drug usage among the unhoused exactly parallels drug usage among the housed."

He said, "Well, maybe the ones *you* know aren't using."

I said, "I know the ones I talk to on the street, the ones I did stand-up poetry with, or in the GA office when I, myself, got help temporarily from General Assistance while I worked to keep my home. No more of them are on alcohol and drugs than housed people I know, or even wealthy people I know. Drug use is not isolated to one segment of society.

"Some street dwellers drink or take drugs because life on the street is so brutal. Some develop a drug habit, seeking momentary relief from terrible discomfort only *after* they are forced to sleep on cement in the rain. The disabled homeless often use narcotics to ease physical pain, just like 'normal,' housed, disabled people do. You don't see housed people drinking or drugging because they do it behind closed doors. Street people are visible because they have no homes."

He said, "Well, I know down in the Castro, over on Haight, those people just act crazy. Those homeless people are all crazy, you know."

I said, "If you can say something like that, you are not worth talking to because you know nothing. People like you go around saying ignorant things like 'the homeless are all crazy,' and you create a lot of trouble for people who have been terribly victimized."

He said, "Listen, honey. All those homeless people are nuts!"

I shot back, "Watch what you say. It's nonsense."

When I told Caroline about this man, she said, "That sounds like a new scam. Brand new."

I asked, "How does one claim to have been homeless himself and then slander the homeless, calling them crazy drug addicts!"

Caroline observed, "The person that screams the loudest is always, always guilty of doing what he says he doesn't like. He wants to make an impression on you that he's above and beyond what he's putting down. Anybody who screams that loud and hard is so guilty, it just makes my heart stop."

He seemed to me like the people who Caroline said would not look at her on the street out of the fear that is sometimes disguised as anger. In this faltering economy, they know in a pink-slip minute they could be next. "It is amazing the things they say. One man threw a dime and four pennies at me today, and scoffed, 'That's all you people are worth. Fourteen cents.' "

If the man outside the market was using this refugee relief organization as a tool for survival, the method seemed slimy and hypocritical. By contrast, Caroline's way is honest, creative, and loving. Too bad this "Savior of Refugees" ran into me outside Molly Stone's. Lucky I don't know his name. I would submit it to *Poor Magazine* for the "Poverty Anti-Hero Award."

Caroline would get my resounding vote for "Poverty Hero of The Year."

City Workers Seize Caroline's Cats

by Carol Harvey

Caroline Jack told me that two women from Animal Care and Control came on Thursday, November 15, and stole three of Caroline's cats, physically hurting her in the process. Animal Care and Control seems to believe that homeless people abuse their cats just by being homeless. I have seen Caroline's cats on many occasions. None of them is sick or abused. She takes excellent care of her cats.

A blonde woman dragged Caroline an entire city block down the street through traffic in her wheelchair as Caroline clung to one end of her cat and they pulled the cat from the poor beast's other end. During the fracas in which her cats were "confiscated," SFPD stood by, watched, and did not stop the two Animal Care and Control workers from manhandling Caroline and taking her cats.

Caroline now has a lump on the back of her neck where this aggravated her scoliosis and it swelled up. I felt it this evening. (This is a woman who was taken to the hospital by ambulance two weeks before. Her heart was giving her problems, and she could not breathe.)

In this case, city officials from Animal Care and Control and the SFPD have proven that their treatment of animals is more humane than their treatment of human beings who just happen to be unhoused and have lost their civil rights thereby.

Caroline is afraid they will "put down" her cats if she doesn't get a lawyer to help her immediately. She would rather sleep on the street than be housed somewhere without the cats she loves. Caroline's many friends are trying to arrange a living situation for her where she can continue her work of rescuing cats.

Donations for Caroline can be sent to D. Blackburn, 840 California, #38, San Francisco, CA 94108. Anyone interested in helping Caroline by connecting her to a good lawyer, or with donations, can e-mail e.c.Harvey@att.net or dlblackburn@hotmail.com.

Society's Collective Delusions

by Jack Bragen

People who are not considered "mentally ill" are actually those who get their delusions from the people around them, rather than from themselves. Consider the world of Business. What is "Incorporation"? It is a paperwork process that modifies other paperwork, which limits "liability," meaning the person running a company is less likely to go to jail or lose all their money if they do unethical or incompetent things.

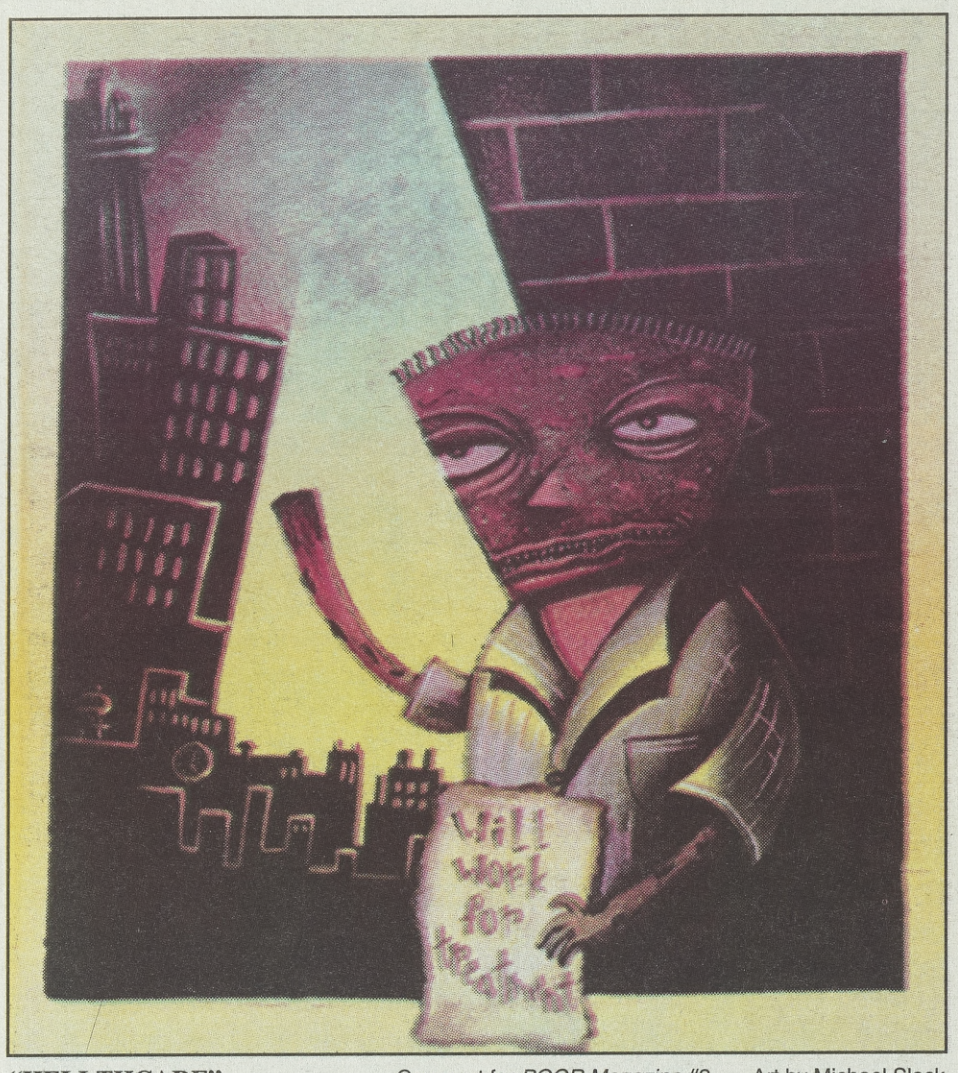
What about all these other weird things that people do with money? For example, a person can get rich by running a "mutual fund," which is a share of a combination of other shares, which in turn are a piece of a "corporation," which is that paperwork thing.

What about all this tax accounting? All this math is done for the theoretical purpose of everyone paying their fair share. However, in reality it is simply a bunch of weird math that doesn't really mean anything. My point goes beyond the typical, given one about the rich oppressing the poor. I am saying that we have a strange collective system of delusion, math, and symbolism connected to monetary transactions which is insane.

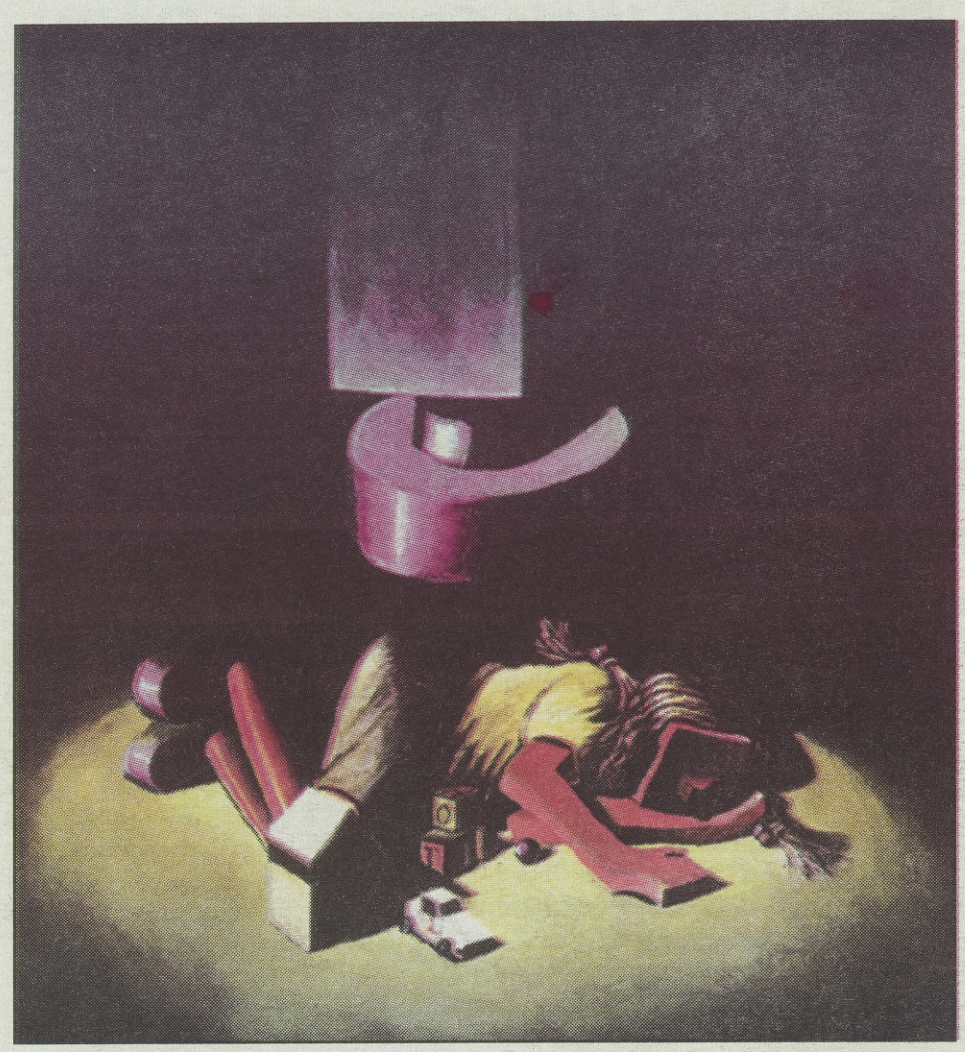
The criminal justice system is closely intertwined and has the same pattern of weird terminology that doesn't really mean anything. Our health care system is hardly better — or it could be worse, since in the name of curing people, all manner of sadistic and bizarre stuff is done to the human body, and the individual is helped about one-third of the time, after enough torture.

The world of Information Technology is a similar situation. Windows, which I am good at using and repairing, was designed to exclude the common folk by using its own weird terminology and procedures. It would have been just as easy to design it in such a way that most people could understand it, and fix it when there's a problem.

So if you're worried about yourself being crazy vs. society, give plenty of lip service to society; but keep your eyes open... and watch your back.



"HELLTHCARE" Cover art for *POOR Magazine* #2. Art by Michael Slack



"HOMEFULNESS" Cover art for *POOR Magazine* #1. Art by Evri Kwong

STREET POETRY FROM PO' POETS

Peace Without Justice

by Don Eli

The Beast of Empire patrols
a silent Latin American night.
Another poet is disappeared.
A union organizer's dismembered body
floats quietly down the polluted stream.
Villagers cower behind curtains
drawn in dismayed isolation
as the palpable spell of fear grows.
And peace without justice prevails.
The midnight sky of South Central Los Angeles
is floodlit by circling helicopters
as police gun down a resisting citizen
caught driving while black.
Trembling children cling in terror
to skirts of mortified mothers.
And peace without justice prevails.

The Whore of Empire proudly displays
her lit up Las Vegas, glittering with promise
as the glamour of lust is aroused.
Hapless citizens dream of their lucky night.
Entranced for a glorious moment
before humbly retreating
to their feathered cells.
TVs light up suburban living rooms
where fat gluttons are seduced
with visions of grandeur
while they struggle to catch their breath
after a hard day of slavery
disguised as the American dream.
Enthralled by images of a better tomorrow
they vote with their silence
And peace without justice prevails.

Crazy for feeling so lonely

by Lisa Gray-Garcia (Tiny)

Crazy… Crazy for feeling…
so lonely
I think it was the shiny
green plastic of the hefty
bag that held the contents
of what used to be our

apartment… and the soft
way it felt to my fingers —
or maybe it was the thick
black boots of the

marshals — they always have
the thickest, blackest

boots… or the clanking of
the locksmith and the
salivating of the landlord
holding our 22nd unlawful
detainer in his hands
or maybe it was the "shit"
inside the bags that used to
be memoirs, family photos,
clothing, and furniture
before it was thrown out of
a side window into an abyss
of sidewalk, back of car
and trashcan, divorced from
its lofty "status" of
things — now lucky to be
called "shit"

Crazy… crazy… for feeling…
or maybe it was the inside
of your mouth as my tongue
tried to reach for a
yes…
a yes that you would
help with my rent when we
were on the brink of
eviction,
a yes that you would
bail me out of jail
for serving my time
for crimes
of poverty
or a yes that you wouldn't
be like my father...
who left my poor mother
and me for dead
But you wouldn't shouldn't
couldn't didn't...
'cause I had to learn my
lesson
learn that poverty caused
me to drop out of school in
the sixth grade
learn that we were
homeless,
learn that I had no access,
no privilege
and learn it good

Crazy… Crazy… for feeling…
So when did I start to understand
what was wrong…
Perhaps when you stood there
looking at me...
Sexually attracted to my
incarceration...
Perhaps when the Ca-chunk
of fresh paint from your
2000 jeep cherokee
Slammed in my face as you
said no — just NO… I'm not
helping you
EVER
Or Perhaps… it was the five
women… my cellmates, who
knew like me, the absolute
pain of never being
comfortable —
To always live behind the
bars of poverty
and its extended
family… domestic
violence, fear
substance abuse and crisis
Bars so thick they can't
ever be overcome
or overpaid…
Crazy… Crazy… Crazy… For
loving you…

The Poor Nation

by A. Faye Hicks

The PEOPLE are being Scattered
Shuffling along with blankets, backpacks,
Shopping bags & pushing carts
No more Unity in the poor Nations
Park benches uprooted—shopping carts overturned,
Homeless people unjustly arrested
Police circling around like VULTURES,
Camouflaged as Human Beings
The sick living in doorways & behind cardboard boxes.
Bathrooms locked, water fountains denied
"This is a sad state," thought the tired so-called Bag Lady
Alone, Mental Faculties sorely tested,
Weakened by a gnawing hunger.
From her womb, Misery was etched
Upon her copper tone belly
She paused to rest for a moment
Dark eyes gazing into the distant skies
Pondering the next move
Remembering the Peaks of her non-existence
An old Lady at eighteen
Birds flying in formation, overhead
Dark clouds floating silently in shapes of nightmares
Her only safe shelter the Blazing Sun,
Capturing her attention
"If only I had a Star to wish upon or
Something I can get some energy from."
She stepped upon the wet, well-cut lawn of a
California City Hall
Its dampness drinking in & nourishing her being
Her breast painful from unused Mother's Milk
Sticking to her dress, Ragged around the edges of her soul.
Its wetness the Morning Dew or Her Deluge of Tears
Coming from deep within an inner well.
THE POOR POOR NATION
Ah, The grass, so soothing to her wiggling toes. COMFORT
Half-worrying about Police Surveillance
Knowing she was on Public Property
Not daring to rest because a
Trespassing ticket would dip into her Funds
The gold nail polish on her sunburnt toes glinting magically
Spiraling undrugged thoughts upward seeking SUCCOR
A hole in the Bushy Hedges?
Dare she rest? A Haven?
Her curled into a Tiny Ball! Her hide-away bed!
The City Hall with its Black & Gold Dome,
Warrin' against a winter sun, a King's Ransom,
Battling against the principals of the Homeless Nation,
Unnatural Flags, weavin' in the Beautiful Breezes,
Compromising Life
One Nation Under God?
YO! YES
The power hunger god!
The prestigious god!
The Greedy Gut god!
And the blood thirsty one!
Ah, Knowing she sighed, Better get a move on
There is no rest for my weary Bones here.